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The Real thing

Madrid's bid to be Europe's best

Face to face...

Roberto Carlos
Milutinovic
Southgate
Bierhoff
Shearer
Aristizabal
Lobanovsky
Beckenbauer

Profit motive

Who gains from football's dash for cash

UDINESE ANDREAS HERZOG STEFAN EFFENBERG CLUB BRUGGE SAVIO MONACO

20 Champions League
Madrid… Manchester… Munich… the essential quarter-final preview

MARCH 1998
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March 1998

PICK UP any English newspaper in recent months, turn to the back pages and you could easily be fooled into thinking that Manchester United already have the 1998 Champions Cup in the bag – so unshakeable is the belief in England that United have what it takes to win Europe's top prize.

Far be it for us to spoil the party (and there is ample evidence to suggest that Alex Ferguson's young side can triumph in Amsterdam in May), but there are seven other quarter-finalists who would beg to differ. Starting with Franz Beckenbauer, Valery Lobanovsky and Jean Tigana – all interviewed in our quarter-finals preview, which starts on page 20.

Interviews with big names loom large this month. Roberto Carlos, Oliver Bierhoff, Bora Milutinovic and Gareth Southgate are just some of the people we spoke to. We also hear what Alan Shearer has to say about his return from injury – admittedly not a lot, but as he would say, it's not about Alan Shearer, it's about the whole magazine. Which is just as well, as our countdown to France 98 has begun in earnest. This month we continue our look at all 32 World Cup finalists with a second free 40-page booklet – essential, impartial and exclusive to WORLD SOCCER.

Gavin Hamilton

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Keir Radnedge
COMMENTARY

Good business by UFA

SMART work on the television front has been undertaken by German-based media conglomerate, UFA, which has spent a comparatively paltry £15million buying the TV rights for the Euro 2000 qualifying matches from 24 of Europe's minnows.

Generosity? Not a bit of it. The five and six-team groups means that all the minnows are certain of at least two home games against the European giants, which will mean good business for UFA's subsidiaries and their various partners.

These include the UK's Channel 5 which thus gains access to several England away matches – and leaves Sky, BBC and ITV out in the cold.

Nice going.

Munich mistake

MILLIONS of people in Britain first learned the full horror of the Manchester United air crash from BBC radio and television news bulletins. Yet Friday, February 6 – the 40th anniversary of Munich – passed without a BBC programme marking the event. Full marks to ITV for doing so – and for treating so sensitively the poignant memories of relatives and friends.

Johansson just the ticket ...but not for the fans

Don't blame the French for the World Cup tickets fiasco – it's FIFA's fault again

All the president's men...in-fighting grows ever fiercer for Johansson, Havelange and Blatter

SELLING World Cup tickets in packages is understandable, even if that hands fans the option of attending only some of the games and leaving plenty of seats empty on other days.

Selling tickets without any control over package mark-up prices seems naive.

Selling tickets on a basis which takes no account of likely demand or geographical realities seems plain crazy.

Michel Platini, Fernand Sastre and their colleagues in the French World Cup organising committee have come under fire for what appeared, initially, to be their mishandling of the tickets issue.

First to raise the alarm about ticket quotas were the Belgians and Dutch, furious and embarrassed that, between them, they had been granted only 11,200 tickets for their match in the 80,000-capacity Stade de France on June 13. The Belgians have already had 120,000 requests for tickets. The Dutch are also only being allocated 4,700 tickets for the match against South Korea in Marseille and just 2,200 for the Mexico game.

Such limited ticket allocations raise serious concerns about security. As KNVB spokesman Rob De Leede said: "Some fans will get tickets via friends and relatives in France or through the black market. Then we don't know where they will be sitting which could become a problem."

When the English FA also expressed concern, Platini and Co responded that they were only following FIFA guidelines based on ticket allocations from previous World Cups whereby certain percentages for each match go to the host nation, FIFA, the sponsors and the federations.

UEFA president Lennart Johansson pulled no punches, saying: "If I were FIFA president, I would change the system. Too few tickets are being given to the nations. There is criticism of this at every World Cup but this time quotas are particularly low, and it is too late to do anything about it."

That's rich! The French work under the guidance of FIFA, which has its own World Cup organising committee. And who is president of that committee? Lennart Johansson, no less.

To be fair to Johansson – and we must be neutral in these matters – he acceded to the committee presidency only at the start of last year after the death of Guillermo Canedo. However, he was previously committee vice-president, as he was for the 1994 World Cup.

The closer we come to FIFA Congress on June 8, the more the presidential election process appears to be governed by the Chaos Theory (the latest whisper is that Havelange may decide to end the fighting by staying on for a further two years).

Johansson chose the weekend of the European Championship draw in Gent to launch his manifesto in a glossy brochure featuring messages and statements of support from a wide number of the great and the good of world football. Not all the contributors knew the purpose to which their words would be put – and certainly the use of the FIFA logo, with the 'for the good of the game' message on the front cover, was highly contentious.

Johansson supporters, such as Italy's Antonio Matarrese and Germany's Egidius Braun, did their man no favours by railroading UEFA into writing to FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter demanding to know if he would stand for president.

With supporters like that...

Blatter, who has until the deadline of April 7, wisely kept his own counsel, though he told me in Paris that he would hardly be able to resist standing if any federation proposed him. Several Asian federations are ready to do so and perhaps Switzerland – a possible sign of erosion of Johansson support within Europe which may give UEFA's boss cause for concern.

'Such limited ticket allocations raise serious concerns about security'

Hypocrisy reigned – not least when Braun and Matarrese demanded that Blatter quit as FIFA general secretary if he wished to stand "so as not to compromise the authority of his office".

In that case, let Johansson lead the way by resigning as UEFA president, vice-president of FIFA and president of its World Cup organising committee.

Come to think of it, some of Johansson's critics over the tickets fiasco may yet demand that sacrifice, in any case.

Agent-buster...Leaver

Waiting for a window

PETER LEAVER, chief executive of the Premier League, is in favour of European-wide transfer restrictions – allowing deals in the close-season and in a mid-winter window. It's a cause this magazine has been advocating for almost 37 years.

Leaver believes such restrictions would effectively curtail the way in which agents are currently rampaging through football, destabilising players, managers, clubs and the entire balance of the game.

I have always believed that such a restriction would help clubs and managers – and the media – concentrate their energies more on football itself.

Whether the European Commission would approve of such transfer restrictions is another matter. It's already preparing to take on FIFA over the way in which the agents' licensing system is administered, in particular over the controversial £100,000 bond which must be provided as a guarantee of good faith.

Julie puts the men to shame

Ronaldo wasn't the only star of the show at FIFA's Disneyland gala night

JULIE FOUDY – it rhymes with 'rowdy' – is the Sigourney Weaver lookalike who was the real star of the FIFA gala at Disneyland Paris which launched the International Football Hall of Champions. The event combined presentation of FIFA's Footballer of the Year award with the first inductions into the officially-backed hall of fame being developed near the resort.

Foudy is the American woman soccer star whose wider concerns about the game put the majority of tunnel-vision male players to shame. When Reebok was negotiating a sponsorship deal with the US women's team, Foudy made a point of accompanying executives to Pakistan to assure herself that child labour was not being used in the manufacture of footballs.

Foudy says: "A lot of athletes, myself included, had tended not to think about how the equipment we use is made. I strongly felt that, in order to speak publicly about the issue of child labour in soccer, I needed to see the situation for myself."

It was once estimated that soccer balls in the Sialkot region of Pakistan had been farmed out to 'stitching centres' in which up to 20 per cent of the workers were children. Not any more, and Foudy has added a FIFA fair play award to her status as joint US captain, Olympic gold-medallist and women's World Cup winner.

Another FIFA fair play award went to the fans of the Irish Republic for their exemplary behaviour in defeat. Belgium manager Georges Leekens was the man they had to thank. He was amazed, after his team's victory over the Irish in the World Cup play-off in Brussels, at the way in which the visiting fans not only encouraged their own team but applauded the Belgians.

As for Ronaldo's election as the greatest player on the planet, FIFA polled 121 national team managers for their top three players – three points being awarded for first place, two for second and one for third. Ronaldo was placed first by no fewer than 86 coaches and thus became the first player to win the award two years in a row.

The nine British players to gather votes were Alan Shearer (16), Ryan Giggs (seven), Robbie Fowler, Teddy Sheringham and Ian Wright (three), David Beckham and Paul Ince (two), and Andy Cole and Steve McManaman (one).

Votes for the Premiership's foreign contingent were: Dennis Bergkamp (62), Peter Schmeichel (14), Gianfranco Zola (11), Faustino Asprilla (nine – including a first place vote from Colombia boss Hernan Gomez), Tore Andre Flo (five), Jurgen Klinsmann (four), Slaven Bilic and Mark Fish (three), Roberto Di Matteo, David Ginola and Paulo Wanchope (one). Scotland's only mention came via Rangers' Dane, Brian Laudrup (three).

Brazil and Germany had most nominees (nine), followed by England (eight) and Italy (seven). Of the home managers, only Bobby Gould considered Ronaldo worth a vote, placing him first, ahead of Holland's Ronald De Boer and Turkey's Abdullah Ercan.

Glenn Hoddle voted his top three as Bergkamp, Roberto Carlos and Ince; Craig Brown voted for Bergkamp, Schmeichel and Spain's Fernando Hierro; and Bryan Hamilton, still Northern Ireland boss at polling time, voted for Bergkamp, Zidane and Germany's Jorg Heinrich. The Irish Republic's Mick McCarthy opted for Bergkamp, Zidane and Zola.

The full gala night honours list was as follows:

Hall of Champions inductees: Franz Beckenbauer, Sir Bobby Charlton, Johan Cruyff, Alfredo Di Stefano, Eusebio, Sir Stanley Matthews, Pele, Michel Platini, Ferenc Puskas, Lev Yashin (Players); Sir Matt Busby, Rinus Michels (Managers); Michel Vautrot (Referee); Jules Rimet (pioneer); Real Madrid (Club); Brazil (National team). Jacques Goddet, founder of *L'Equipe* (Media). Horst Dassler, late of Adidas, founder of ISL agency (For the good of the game).

The full list of FIFA award-winners was as follows:

Footballer of the Year: 1 Ronaldo (Inter, Brazil), 2 Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid, Brazil), joint 3 Dennis Bergkamp (Arsenal, Holland) and Zinedine Zidane (Juventus, France). Fair Play: Julie Foudy (US), Republic of Ireland supporters, Josef Zovinec (veteran Slovak, never booked or sent off). Top-ranked national team: Brazil. Most improved in rankings: Yugoslavia.

● *Full voting, FIFA World Footballer of the Year, page 10.*

Julie Foudy...recognition for her stand against child exploitation

Bye bye BBC

BBC will be sharing World Cup coverage with ITV this summer in the usual way (despite all the aggressive pre-negotiation hype). Watch closely. It could be last time the corporation qualifies for the finals.

I understand that ITV and Sky are preparing to make a joint bid for the UK rights to the finals of 2002 and 2006. That would leave the BBC a World Cup-free zone.

Up until now, FIFA has always done European rights business with the European Broadcasting Union which represents, largely, the terrestrial state TV channels. Through membership of the EBU, both BBC and ITV gained comparatively low-cost rights to show all World Cup finals matches.

After France 98, however, the scenario shifts. Rights for 2002 and 2006 have been sold to the Kirch group for a vastly inflated sum. Kirch, to get its money back and make a profit, must auction TV rights to the highest bidders...and that, inevitably, means pay-TV.

FIFA insists it wants to maintain freedom of access for the major matches. Thus, the Opening Match and Final and a handful of other games will be available free for terrestrial channels but the bulk will only be shown on the cable and satellite channels.

That opened up the prospect of joint bids. Sky and ITV, already in bed for the FA Cup and England home internationals and both commercially financed through advertising, are already talking it over.

If the BBC is to compete, it will have to raise sums far beyond the power of its sports budget. There is, of course, the prospect of a major bonus to the winner: the right to be host broadcaster if England succeeds in its bid to host the 2006 finals.

EXCLUSIVE by Keir Radnedge

World Club Championship launch next year

Warner plan targets July for top eight clubs to fight it out

JULY 1999 has been pencilled in for the first World Club Championship, according to FIFA vice-president Jack Warner.

That news will upset European clubs but delight top outfits in the rest of the world who have been waiting impatiently for FIFA to spell out plans for a more worthy club championship than the outmoded annual joust in Tokyo between the champions of Europe and South America.

Warner, Trinidadian president of CONCACAF, was put in charge of the study project by FIFA after president Joao Havelange, on informing the executive in December 1996 of his impending retirement, noted that the club arena was the only one in which the federation had yet to create a world championship.

"I expect FIFA to give the World Club Championship the go-ahead later this year," says Warner. "Obviously, with a presidential election coming up, people have other business on their minds. But the principle has already been agreed and now we are ready to get down to the details.

"We wrote to all the confederations to try to find the most suitable time of year in which to hold such a tournament. The general consensus was between the second and fourth weeks of July every two years in the odd years between World Cups and European Championships. So that is what we will propose, starting next year."

Every regional confederation will be represented if Warner has his way, with priority representation for Europe and South America.

Warner says: "The championship would be staged in one country and feature eight clubs – one from each of Oceania, Africa, Asia and Central-North America, plus two from Europe and two from South America."

Previous proposals by which the Tokyo winners would also compete in the tournament have been rejected – which leaves the annual match, the cause of so much controversy in the 1960s and 1970s, going nowhere.

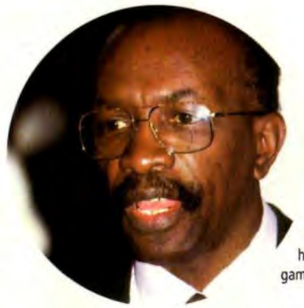
"We don't want to see the Europe-South America Cup scrapped," says Warner. "For one thing, it will certainly continue because it must fulfil the various sponsorship and commercial contracts. But, in time, if the World Club Championship is a success then I suppose it would be phased out."

Complaints about the ever-increasing demands on players will have to wait. As far as Warner is concerned, he assumes the confederations know their own business and can square the fixture scheduling. He also believes the latest proposals provide an adequate answer to previous objections about fair treatment for the club champions of Europe and South America in the "off" years.

Warner says: "By allowing two clubs from each of Europe and South America, the champions of the previous year and the current year can take part, so nobody misses out."

Thus a World Club Championship in July next year would have Europe represented not only by the 1999 Champions League winners, but also by this season's winners – Juventus, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich, Manchester United or whoever.

But Warner's role as a vice-president of FIFA has not deflected any of his concerns as president of CONCACAF to ensure that the smaller nations are not trodden underfoot by the giants of the game or the financially all-powerful European clubs. Marcus Gayle was a case in point – Warner taking up Jamaica's complaint against Wimbledon with FIFA's players statutes committee and getting a result.



'I expect FIFA to give it the go-ahead later this year… the principle has already been agreed' – **Jack Warner**

The Gayle saga began last June when he signed a new contract for his club which included a clause committing his international loyalty to England – a clause used increasingly by clubs because of concerns over English restrictions on the number of non-European Union players allowed in a team.

Gayle soon realised the trap he had fallen into when Jamaica, for whom he has a parental qualification, reached the World Cup finals and started hunting reinforcements – Chelsea's Frank Sinclair being another – in English football.

Gayle did once play representative football for England but that was as a 17-year-old in a youth international friendly and this would not have prevented his switching country loyalties.
He had already attended Jamaica training camps when Wimbledon insisted he had forfeited his right to play for Jamaica.

FIFA did not agree. Warner says: "We looked into all aspects of this case and had no doubt: a player's nationality is not something which can be used as a bargaining tool. Any player has an absolute right to play his international football for whichever country he wishes and for which he is qualified. Once he has played in a competitive international he cannot change but that was not the case with Gayle. This is a tremendous opportunity for him because clearly the chance of representing England had passed him by now.

"Of course it is up to Rene Simoes, Jamaica's manager, to pick his World Cup team but I would be very surprised if Gayle were not selected."

Warner comes up for re-election as CONCACAF president at the regional congress in Antigua in early May. No one has yet put themselves forward to run against him and no one is likely to – not considering the present feel-good factor.

It's eight years since Warner was first elected and he can point to a flood of achievements. The number of regional competitions has increased from four to 11; the number of standing committees from five to 18, including club competition and player statutes committees; World Cup finals representation has been increased from two to three; and the United States has come on board the world game. Indeed, the US will long be able to boast statistically the most successful World Cup of all with a capacity 3.6million tickets sold (compared with 2.5million for more matches but smaller stadia in France).

When Warner took over, CONCACAF had one small office in Guatemala City. Now it also has offices in Port of Spain – so Warner can be "hands on" in Trinidad – and in New York, under the command of general secretary Chuck Blazer, now also a member of the FIFA executive since the death of Mexican Guillermo Canedo.

Warner says: "In the past few years, we have put our region's football on the world map. Do you think Brazil would come to play in the Gold Cup, our regional championship, if it wasn't worth their while? When we hear of British clubs complaining about having to release their players for the Gold Cup, it tells us how well they are doing as our football ambassadors."

The future looks equally rosy. Warner's own Trinidad and Tobago will host the World Under-17 Cup in 2001, the first world championship ever awarded to the Caribbean region. Warner wants to see still greater effort invested in youth football, in improving refereeing standards, in sports medicine, and in marketing.

And who will be the FIFA president setting the 2001 World Under-17 Cup under way?

Warner will discuss the CONCACAF line at regional congress in Antigua. Unlike Charles Dempsey of Oceania and Issa Hayatou, he was canny enough to avoid putting pen to paper in praise of Lennart Johansson in the promotional brochure put together by the UEFA president's supporters. He has not worked "up to 20 hours a day" for CONCACAF to miss a trick like that.

Not that Warner is happy about the run-up to the FIFA presidential election. He says: "It's becoming very contentious within the game. The trouble is it's the first time in 24 years – since Havelange was first elected – that we have had this situation. There are ways to run a campaign and there are ways not to.

"It's all becoming a bit fraught. But have no doubt: FIFA is strong enough to withstand it."

Tokyo heroes… Dortmund beat Cruzeiro to win the World Club Cup, an annual fixture now threatened by an eight-team World Club Championship

Euro 2000 Qualifying draw

UEFA EURO 2000 The Low Countries

GROUP 1	GROUP 4	GROUP 7
Italy Denmark Switzerland Wales Belarus	Russia France Ukraine Iceland Armenia Andorra	Romania Portugal Slovakia Hungary Liechtenstein Azerbaijan
GROUP 2	**GROUP 5**	**GROUP 8**
Norway Greece Georgia Latvia Slovenia Albania	England Bulgaria Sweden Poland Luxembourg	Yugoslavia Croatia Republic of Ireland Macedonia Malta
GROUP 3	**GROUP 6**	**GROUP 9**
Germany Turkey Finland Northern Ireland Moldova	Spain Austria Israel Cyprus San Marino	Scotland Czech Rep Lithuania Bosnia-Herzegovina Faroe Islands Estonia

Holland and Belgium qualify automatically as hosts.
Group winners, plus best-placed runner-up, qualify automatically for finals.
Eight remaining runners-up enter two-legged play-offs.

SCHEDULE

1st match	September 5, 6, 1998
2nd match	October 10, 11
3rd match	October 13, 14
4th match	March 27, 28, 1999
5th match	March 30, 31
6th match	June 5, 6
7th match	June 8, 9
8th match	September 4, 5
9th match	September 7, 8
10th match	October 9, 10

Mother of all cups

A NEW CUP is hardly worthy of mention these days – there are so many of them – but one being set up in Iraq has raised our eyebrows.

Iraq is hardly one of the world's soccer hotbeds, but apparently Saddam Hussein is keen on improving playing standards and is setting up a contest for the country's top four clubs.

And its name? The Mother Of All Battles Cup – after the 1991 Gulf War.

End of the glove affair

Walter Zenga, the goalkeeper who won 58 caps with Italy, has decided to hang up his gloves. "This decision was one of the hardest of my life," said the 38-year-old, who has been playing for New England Revolution in the MLS. "I loved playing for the Revolution but I miss my family in Italy and I need to think hard about my career after soccer."

Puhl's costly miss

Hungarian referee misses World Cup finals after rapid fall from grace

Time's up...Rotterdam incident is main reason for Puhl's absence from France

SANDOR PUHL will long regret missing Paul Bosvelt's awful challenge on Denis Irwin in last autumn's Champions League tie between Feyenoord and Manchester United – because it was the last stud in the coffin of his World Cup prospects.

Until last year, Hungarian referee Puhl had appeared to be the darling of international officialdom. He refereed the 1994 World Cup Final, the England v Germany semi-final at the 1996 European Championship and last year's Champions League Final between Borussia Dortmund and Juventus.

In the succeeding eight months, however, Puhl has plummetted to an international non-person. First he was struck off UEFA's list for the rest of the season after the Rotterdam episode and now he has been eliminated from officiating at the World Cup.

FIFA's referees committee, headed by David Will, chooses its World Cup referees according to estimates of general performance levels, and it appears remarkable that Puhl has crashed down the rankings in so short a time. Age has nothing to do with it. Both he and Hungary's new No 1, Laszlo Vagner, are 42.

Each geographical region is represented in the World Cup list but, despite past talk to the contrary, no country is deemed worthy of more than one referee. Some 12 of the World Cup finalists are not represented by a referee: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Croatia, Iran, Jamaica, Nigeria, Romania, South Africa, South Korea, Tunisia and Yugoslavia.

As far as referee assistants are concerned, it's good news and bad. Good news that FIFA has recognised the separate specialist nature of the job; bad news that the body has yet to go the whole way and appoint refereeing 'teams'.

Keir Radnedge

WORLD CUP REFEREES

AFRICA: Said Belqota (Mor), Gamal Ghandour (Egy), Lim Kee Ching (Mauritius), Sidi Bekaye Magassa (Mali), Charles Masembe (Ug).
ASIA: Abdul Al Zeid (SAr), Ali Mohamed Bujsaim (UAE), Masayoshi Okada (Jpn), Pirom Un-Prasert (Thai).
CENTRAL AND NORTH AMERICA: Esfandiar Baharmast (US), Brizio Carter (Mex), Ramesh Ramdhan (TT).
EUROPE: Marc Batta (Fr), Gunter Benko (Aus), Pierluigi Collina (It), Hugh Dallas (Sc), Paul Durkin (Eng), Anders Frisk (Swe), Garcia Aranda (Sp), Bernd Heynemann (Ger), Nikolai Levnikov (Rus), Urs Meier (Swz), Kim Milton Nielsen (Den), Rune Pedersen (Nor), Vitor Pereira (Por), Laszlo Vagner (Hun), Mario Van der Ende (Hol).
OCEANIA: Edward Lennie (Australia).
SOUTH AMERICA: Javier Castrilli (Arg), Gonzalez Chavez (Par), Rezende de Freitas (Brz), Sanchez Yanten (Ch), Tejada Noriega (Peru), Toro Rendon (Col).

REFEREE ASSISTANTS

AFRICA: Dramana Dante (Mali), Mohamed Mansri (Tun), Achmat Salie (SA), Aristidis Soldatos (SA).
ASIA: Mohamed Al Musawi (Oman), Kussein Ghananfari (Kwt), Halim Abdul Hamid (Malaysia), Young Jeon (SK), Wickeramatunge Samarathna (SrL).
EUROPE: Evzen Amler (Cz), Youri Dupanov (Bls), Edie Foley (NI), Nicolae Grigorescu (Rom), Gennaro Mazzei (It), Michael Nilsson (Swe), Jacek Pociegiel (Pol), Jacques Poudevigne (Fr), Laurent Rausis (Swz), Erich Schneider (Ger), Tresaco Gracia (Sp), Van der Broeck (Bel), Mark Warren (Eng), Emanuel Zammit (Mal).
OCEANIA: Lencie Fred (Vanuatu).
SOUTH AMERICA: Arango Cardona (Col), Diaz Galvez (Ch), Galvan Soto (Par), Arnaldo Pinto Filho (Brz), Claudio Rossi (Arg).

Referee caught in match fix

Italian official blows the whistle on colleague's attempt to bribe him

A NEW match-fixing scandal has surfaced in Italy. Livorno, leaders of their regional group in the equivalent of the Second Division (Serie C1) face relegation after referee Duccio Baglioni alerted authorities to a colleague's attempt at bribery.

As federation president Luciano Nizzola said: "That this has happened in one of the lower divisions is no reason for us to feel complacent about the state of the game at the highest level. Corruption is like a cancer. It can spread everywhere."

Baglioni was telephoned at home by fellow referee Divino Ferrarini who offered him £10,000 to fix a match between Montevarchi and Livorno.

Baglioni said he would think it over and asked Ferrarini to phone back. In the meantime, he reported the approach to senior federation officials and, by the time Ferrarini phoned back, arrangements had been made to monitor and record the call.

Baglioni pretended to go along with the deal, while the league ordered a third referee, Felice Strocchia, to travel in secrecy to the match. Officials of Montevarchi and Livorno, plus the two referee assistants, were all surprised when Strocchia turned up, saying that he had been appointed at short notice because Baglioni "was injured in training".

Montevarchi won the match 1-0. Strocchia awarded Livorno a penalty, but they missed it.

The next day, corruption investigator Biagio Martino turned up on Ferrarini's doorstep. After hearing a recording of the incriminating phone calls, Ferrarini owned up. It remains a mystery, however, on whose behalf he was acting. The referee said only that he had been approached by a man called Franco, acting for a third party. Franco has not been traced.

Livorno president Claudio Achilli denied any knowledge of the attempted match-fixing. "It's nonsense. I learned my lesson a long time ago," he said.

In 1989, Achilli was banned from football for three years after bribing two opposing players while he was president of Pavia. The club was relegated to Serie C2 as punishment.

The worst match-fixing scandal in Italian football was in 1979-80, when 20 players were banned for varied terms for fixing matches on behalf of illegal betting syndicates. Among the culprits was Paolo Rossi, whose ban expired just before the 1982 World Cup finals – in which he scored the goals which shot Italy to glory.

The oddest case was in 1993, when Perugia president Luciano Gaucci was banned for three years after bribing referee Emanuele Senzacqua with the gift of a horse.

Keir Radnedge

Rossi...punished in the 1980s

Down payment

Struggling Racing Santander are at least guaranteed a pay day should they go down at the end of the season. The Spanish side have taken the unusual step of insuring themselves against relegation and will receive some £6million to compensate for the loss of TV royalties should they be playing out of the limelight in Division Two next season.

Wosz...taste police kept tabs on decor

Ex-files

The winter break in Germany afforded Bochum midfielder Dariusz Wosz the chance to settle down with some fascinating reading – his East German secret police files. "They are like a good diary," said the former East German international who scored for the unified Germany on his debut in February 1997. "There are contracts in there which I signed, plus forms and receipts – absolutely everything. They even knew how I had decorated my flat. There is nothing really nasty in them. I am more amused than angry."

Peter Neish

Team of the Month

Total votes: **Schmeichel (3 votes, Man United); G Neville (6, Man United), Thuram (3, Parma), Blanc (4, Marseille), Roberto Carlos (4, Real Madrid); Luis Enrique (6, Barcelona), Owen (3, Liverpool), Zidane (7, Juventus), Guivarc'h (4, Auxerre); Trezeguet (4, Monaco), Bierhoff (5, Udinese).**

The votes

A BOLA (Portugal): Peruzzi (Juventus); Cafu (Roma), Hierro (Real Madrid), Blanc (Marseille), Roberto Carlos (Real); Beckham (Man United), Zidane (Juventus), Owen (Liverpool), Figo (Barcelona); Guivarc'h (Auxerre), Del Piero (Juventus).

DON BALON (Spain): Schmeichel (Man United); G. Neville (Man United), Blanc (Marseille), Thuram (Parma), Jarni (Betis); Moriero (Inter), Zidane (Juventus), Luis Enrique (Barcelona), Pires (Metz); Bierhoff (Udinese), Trezeguet (Monaco).

FOOT (Belgium): Flowers (Blackburn); G. Neville (Man United), Blanc (Marseille), Hendry (Blackburn), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Jardel (Porto), Desailly (Milan), Zidane (Juventus), Rivaldo (Barcelona); Owen (Liverpool), Guivarc'h (Auxerre).

FRANCE FOOTBALL: Konsel (AS Roma); G. Neville (Man United), Ferrara (Juventus), R. Rios (Athletic Bilbao), Lopez Rekarte (Real Sociedad); Helveg (Udinese), Zidane (Juventus), D. Baggio (Parma), Seedorf (Real Madrid); Guivarc'h (Auxerre), Gallacher (Blackburn).

GAZZETTA (Italy): Konsel (Roma); Thuram (Parma), Samm (Atletico Madrid), Pallister (Man United), Torricelli (Juventus); Luis Enrique (Barcelona), Oceano (Sp. Lisbon), Zidane (Juve), Giggs (Man U); Batistuta (Fiorentina), Trezeguet (Monaco).

KICKER (Germany): Kopke (Marseille); G. Neville (Man United), Blanc (Marseille), Campbell (Tottenham), Roberto Carlos (Real); Luis Enrique (Barca), Zidane (Juve), Nedved (Lazio), Figo (Barca); Bierhoff (Udinese), Trezeguet (Monaco).

SPORT (Switzerland): Schmeichel (Man United), G. Neville (Man United), Hierro (Real Madrid), Kastendeuch (Metz), Roberto Carlos (Real); Luis Enrique (Barca), Pires (Metz), Zidane (Juve), Giggs (Man U); Bierhoff (Udinese), Trezeguet (Monaco).

VOETBAL INT (Holland): Schmeichel (Man United); G. Neville (Man United), Montero (Juventus), Ferdinand (West Ham), Lopez Rekarte (Real Sociedad); Luis Enrique (Barcelona), MacManaman (Liverpool), Nedved (Lazio Roma), Davids (Juventus); Bierhoff (Udinese), Guivarc'h (Auxerre).

WORLD SOCCER (England): Peruzzi (Juventus); Panucci (Real Madrid), Bergomi (Inter), Thuram (Parma), Maldini (Milan); Moriero (Inter), Luis Enrique (Barcelona), Djorkaeff (Inter), Pires (Metz); Owen (Liverpool), Bierhoff (Udinese).

FIFA WORLD PLAYER OF THE YEAR 97
– the full voting from Paris

THE STANDINGS

1 Ronaldo (480pts)
2 Roberto Carlos (85)
3 Bergkamp, Zidane (62)
4 Raul (51)
5 Del Piero (27)
6 Suker (20)
7 Batistuta, Shearer (16)
8 Leonardo, Schmeichel (14)
9 Djorkaeff, Salas (12)
10 Moller, Sammer, Weah, Zola (11)
11 Mijatovic (10)
12 Asprilla (9)
13 Figo (8)
14 Giggs, Rivaldo, Shevchenko (7)
15 Maldini, Veron (6)
16 Denilson, Flo, Hassler, Nemec, Ortega (5)
17 Balakov, Bierhoff, R. De Boer, Klinsmann, Seedorf (4)
18 Bilic, Ferrara, Fish, Fowler, Gamarra, Juninho, B. Laudrup, Luis Enrique, Montero, Reuter, Romario, Sheringham, Thuram, Vieri, Wright, Zamorano (3)
19 Beckham, Daei, Ince (2)
20 Aguinaga, Alfonso, Bagheri, Berezovski, Boban, Chilavert, Cole, Di Matteo, Dunga, Abdullah Ercan, Gallardo, Ginola, Guardiola, Hagi, Heinrich, Hierro, Kohler, Litmanen, Luis Hernandez, Margas, Masinga, McManaman, Peruzzi, Polster, Rai, Salihamidzic, Siraj, Stoichkov, Wanchope, Ziege (1)

HOW THEY VOTED

Country	Coach	1st	2nd	3rd
Albania	Hafizi	Ronaldo	Bierhoff	Figo
Algeria	Mehdaoui	Ronaldo	Zidane	Raul
Andora	Miluir	Ronaldo	Figo	R. Carlos
Angola	Gomes	Ronaldo	Suker	Figo
Argentina	Passarella	Ortega	Veron	Gallardo
Armenia	Hovhanisyan	Raul	Djorkaeff	Berezovski
Austria	Prohaska	Ronaldo	Zidane	Raul
Azerbaijan	Sadikhov	Flo	Ronaldo	Giggs
Bahrain	Guides	Ronaldo	Juninho	Suker
Belarus	Vergeenko	Ronaldo	Vieri	Djorkaeff
Belgium	Leekens	Ronaldo	Bergkamp	Giggs
Bermuda	Best	Ronaldo	Bergkamp	Del Piero
Bolivia	Lopez	Denilson	Ronaldo	Raul
Bosnia	Muzurovic	Zidane	Ronaldo	Salihamidzic
Brazil	Zagallo	Ronaldo	R. Carlos	Seedorf
Bulgaria	Bonev	Ronaldo	Raul	Del Piero
Cameroon	Manga Onguene	Ronaldo	R. Carlos	Sheringham
Canada	Lenarduzzi	Ronaldo	Raul	L. Hernandez
Cape Verde Is.	Antunes	Ronaldo	Suker	Seedorf
Chile	Acosta	Salas	Zamorano	Margas
China	Wusheng	Ronaldo	Shearer	Sammer
Colombia	Gomez	Asprilla	Guardiola	R. Carlos
Cook Islands	Napa	Zola	Maldini	Ginola
Costa Rica	Watson Simes	Ronaldo	Bergkamp	Wanchope
Croatia	Blazevic	Suker	Bilic	Boban
Cuba	Bennet	Ronaldo	Romario	Chilavert
Cyprus	Georgiou	Ronaldo	Raul	Schmeichel
Czech Republic	Uhrin	Nemec	Ronaldo	Moller
Denmark	Johansson	Schmeichel	Ronaldo	Djorkaeff
Ecuador	Maturana	Sammer	Ronaldo	Raul
Egypt	El Gohary	Ronaldo	Fowler	Schmeichel
El Salvador	Djoric	Ronaldo	Raul	Stoichkov
England	Hoddle	Bergkamp	R. Carlos	Ince
Estonia	Thordarson	Ronaldo	Zidane	Rivaldo
Ethiopia	Asheber	Ronaldo	Weah	Siraj
Faroe Islands	Simonsen	Hassler	Ronaldo	Raul
Fiji	Singh	Ronaldo	Suker	Del Piero
Finland	Moller Nielsen	Ronaldo	B. Laudrup	Kohler
France	Jacquet	Ronaldo	Zidane	Bergkamp
Georgia	Gutsaev	Ronaldo	Leonardo	Ziege
Germany	Bonhof	Leonardo	Ronaldo	Balakov
Greece	Polychroniou	Ronaldo	Weah	Raul
Guatemala	Cordero	Ronaldo	Veron	Aguinaga
Holland	Hiddink	Bergkamp	Zidane	R. De Boer
Honduras	Company	Ronaldo	Salas	Raul
Hong Kong	Kwuk	Ronaldo	Bergkamp	Zidane
Hungary	Csank	Ronaldo	Schmeichel	Weah
Iceland	Thordarson	Ronaldo	Shearer	Leonardo
India	Uddin	Ronaldo	Del Piero	Shevchenko
Iran	Zolfharnassab	Ronaldo	Reuter	Daei
Iraq	Baba Daoud	Ronaldo	R. Carlos	Sammer
Israel	Shlomo	Ronaldo	Raul	(no vote)
Italy	Maldini	Ronaldo	Thuram	Raul
Ivory Coast	Nouzaret	R. Carlos	Moller	Raul
Jamaica	Simoes	Ronaldo	Zidane	R. Carlos
Japan	Okada	Ronaldo	Zidane	Dunga
Jordan	Awad	Ronaldo	R. Carlos	Del Piero
Korea	Cha	Ronaldo	Del Piero	R. Carlos
Kyrgyzstan	Novikov	Del Piero	Shevchenko	Daei
Latvia	Gillis	Ronaldo	Raul	Bergkamp
Lebanon	Berjaoui	Leonardo	Zidane	Raul
Libya	Ben Hamed	Batistuta	Ronaldo	Raul
Liechtenstein	Riedl	Ronaldo	Raul	Polster
Lithuania	Zelkevicius	Ronaldo	Del Piero	Batistuta
Luxembourg	Philipp	Ronaldo	Balakov	R. Carlos
Macedonia	Hadzievski	Mijatovic	Ronaldo	Del Piero
Malaysia	Souissi	Ronaldo	Bergkamp	Seedorf
Maldives	Cortez	Zidane	Salas	Bagheri
Mali	Goita	Ronaldo	Raul	Rai
Malta	Ilic	Ronaldo	R. Carlos	Peruzzi
Mauritania	Chundunsing	Ronaldo	Asprilla	Bergkamp
Moldova	Caras	Ronaldo	R. Carlos	Raul
Morocco	Michel	Ronaldo	Batistuta	Zidane
Mozambique	Arnalou	Ronaldo	Bergkamp	Raul
Namibia	Mogane	Ronaldo	Batistuta	Masinga
New Zealand	McGrath	R. Carlos	Ronaldo	Seedorf
Nicaragua	Cruz	Ronaldo	Batistuta	R. Carlos
Northern Ireland	Hamilton	Bergkamp	Zidane	Heinrich
Norway	Olsen	R. Carlos	Moller	Bergkamp
Oman	Porterfield	Ronaldo	Sammer	Bergkamp
Palestine	Agour	Ronaldo	Shearer	Zola
Paraguay	Carpegiani	Ronaldo	Gamarra	Suker
Peru	Oblitas Saba	Ronaldo	Zidane	Weah
Philippines	Cutillas	Ronaldo	Del Piero	Klinsmann
Poland	Woicik	Ronaldo	Moller	Maldini
Portugal	Jorge	Ronaldo	Figo	Raul
Qatar	Roberto	Ronaldo	Rivaldo	Sammer
Rep of Ireland	McCarthy	Bergkamp	Zidane	Zola
Romania	Iordanescu	Ronaldo	Suker	Hagi
Russia	Ignatiev	Ronaldo	Djorkaeff	Maldini
Rwanda	Longin	Ronaldo	Zidane	Djorkaeff
San Marino	Mazza	Ronaldo	Ferrara	Vieri
San Tome	Correia	Ronaldo	Wright	Cole
Saudi Arabia	Pfister	Ronaldo	Leonardo	Bierhoff
Scotland	Brown	Bergkamp	Schmeichel	Hierro
Singapore	Whitbread	Ronaldo	Bergkamp	Schmeichel
Slovakia	Jankech	Bergkamp	Ronaldo	Moller
Slovenia	Verdenik	Ronaldo	Zidane	R. Carlos
Somalia	Ahmad	Ronaldo	Zidane	Weah
South Africa	Barker	Ronaldo	Fish	Zidane
Spain	Clemente	Raul	Luis Enrique	Alfonso
Sri Lanka	Sirisena	R. Carlos	Ronaldo	Ince
Sudan	El Faki	Ronaldo	Shearer	Weah
Sweden	Svensson	Bergkamp	Ronaldo	McManaman
Switzerland	Fringer	Ronaldo	Zidane	Di Matteo
Tahiti	Vansam	Ronaldo	Raul	Bergkamp
Taiwan	Mu-Tsai	Del Piero	Ronaldo	Litmanen
Tajikistan	Babayev	Ronaldo	Klinsmann	Weah
Thailand	Polchivin	Ronaldo	Zola	Beckham
Tunisia	Kasperczak	Ronaldo	Djorkaeff	Suker
Turkey	Denizli	Giggs	R. Carlos	Ronaldo
UAE	Sandri	Ronaldo	Rivaldo	Zidane
Ukraine	Sabo	R. Carlos	Shevchenko	Ronaldo
United States	Sampson	Ronaldo	R. Carlos	Maldini
Uruguay	Maspoli	Ronaldo	Montero	Batistuta
Venezuela	Alonso	Ronaldo	R. Carlos	Salas
Virgin Islands	Grant	Ronaldo	Shearer	Asprilla
Wales	Gould	Ronaldo	R. De Boer	Ercan
Yemen	Abdulrahman	Ronaldo	R. Carlos	Zola
Yugoslavia	Santrac	Mijatovic	Ronaldo	Shearer
Zambia	Mungwa	Ronaldo	Zidane	Beckham

● *Players received 5pts for a 1st choice; 3pts for a 2nd choice; 1pt for a 3rd choice*

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THE MEN WHO MATTER

Roberto Carlos *Keir Radnedge meets Brazil's cannonball kid*

Bad news for goalkeepers, good news for fans...Roberto Carlos

ROBERTO CARLOS talks the way he plays: explosive, rapid-fire. Every question is treated, initially, as seriously as a free-kick in a World Cup Final. Every answer is punctuated with a winning grin.

For the Brazilian left-back of Real Madrid is a born winner who admits to feeling few nerves in a big game. A man who was even seen smiling and cracking jokes with opponents in Madrid's derbies against Barcelona – an unheard-of piece of mischief.

Perhaps it's all down to confidence. He was probably the least surprised man in the stadium when his magnificent swerving free-kick shot Brazil ahead against France in the Tournoi de France last June.

"It's the greatest goal I have ever scored," he says. "But it wasn't lucky. I scored one just the same for Madrid against Celta Vigo. I took it from about the same position and it swerved as much. The difference was that it wasn't in an international or in front of the world's media. But I approached it exactly the same manner. Every time I take a kick I think I'm going to score. There's no point taking them otherwise."

The 85mph free-kick, a swerving exocet of a shot, was instantly hailed among the greatest goals of modern times. As England coach Glenn Hoddle said: "I don't think I have ever seen a ball bent as much. I doubt we will see a better free-kick."

Roberto Carlos works at his free-kicks every day and the only secret is concentration. "I always practise, every day," he says. "I prefer to kick with the outside of my foot. There's no secret, just concentration. Against France any one of several of us could have taken the free-kicks. But when I saw where we had the free-kick I felt confident. I said: I'm OK to shoot, so Dunga, our captain, gave me the all-clear. The goalkeeper didn't make a mistake. The wall was well-placed. The ball went a long way off line and then came back too fast. That's all."

Roberto Carlos, now 24, started as a forward at Uniao Sao Joao at 16 and represented Brazil for the first time at 18 in the 1992 Olympic qualifying tournament. Then he joined Palmeiras, marking his arrival with one of his trademark goals against Sao Paulo – "I shot from out on the left and it flew in the top far corner."

The ageing of Branco and the departure for Japan of Leonardo after the last World Cup opened up the left-back position for Brazil. Roberto Carlos filled it at the 1995 Umbro Tournament in England with such panache that European club spies came in droves to watch him. Their verdict was unanimous: that he had more attacking qualities than defensive.

He takes the point, admitting that: "I'm learning to defend more. Going to Italy taught me more about defending than all the rest of my career put together."

'One of the great things about attacking from full-back is that you build up momentum'

His transfer came in the summer of 1995. Liverpool thought about a bid and Paris Saint-Germain agreed terms at £2million, then dithered. Inter stepped in with £4.5million and got their man. At first his attacking habits scared the wits out of both coaching staff and fans. Roy Hodgson moved Roberto Carlos forward into midfield but the player was not happy.

"One of the great things about attacking from full-back," he says, "is that you have space ahead of you to build up momentum. But if you start in midfield, then you have a lot less space and a lot fewer options."

So he was happy to transfer to Real Madrid in the summer of 1996. New coach Fabio Capello wanted a 'real' left-back and Roberto Carlos suited the bill technically and tactically.

He says: "It was great how the fans responded to me. That made me feel at home. In Italy I'd had to change my style of play and the lifestyle was strange. But, as soon as I came here, I knew everything would be OK.

"I'm also fortunate that I have a wife and two small children. We married when I was 20 which was very young for all that responsibility. But now it's one of my greatest strengths. I owe it to football!"

He explains: "In Brazil when a young footballer has earned a bit of money the first thing he does is get a car. That makes it easier to get out and about – which is how I met my wife Alejandra. Our first daughter, Roberta, came along within a couple of years and then our second, Giovanna.

"In Brazil, in Italy and now in Spain we spend as much time as we can together. It's important. My three girls keep my feet on the ground. Whatever I achieve in football they won't let me get carried away."

The evidence was there to see in Paris, where Roberto Carlos finished second – a long way second! – behind Ronaldo in the FIFA Footballer of the Year poll. Alejandra was there to share the occasion with her husband, accompany him to the gala dinner and make sure he did the polite rounds of the right people on his way out of the door at a respectable hour.

Family is important to Roberto Carlos. He recalls: "In Araras, when I was a kid, my mother said I must have been born with a silver spoon in my mouth because I was always lucky. I had three sisters and I remember we all had to sleep in one room. My father drove a lorry. We were poor but we were happy.

"That's where I'm going when I retire, home to Araras to breed horses and relax. But that won't be for a long time. I reckon to play on until I'm 39 or even 40."

That's bad news for hundreds of goalkeepers – but good news for millions of fans.

Oliver Bierhoff

Dominique Antognoni talks to Germany's in-demand hero of Euro 96

TWO GOALS against Vicenza in a recent Serie A match took Udinese's German international Oliver Bierhoff to the top of the season's goalscoring charts. They also made him the most prolific German of all time in Italian League football.

WORLD SOCCER: Despite the fact that you're having a great spell at Udinese, there has been speculation in the past 18 months that you were on your way to England...

OLIVER BIERHOFF: Well, they were only rumours! Blackburn were the only team to make me a real offer but I refused immediately. They were bottom of the League, it made no sense to join them.

But you've been linked with other clubs – Inter, Juve, Leeds and Parma...

In the past year there has been much talk, but no concrete offers. Who would refuse playing for a great team? I think I deserve to play for a great team. Now I'm 29 it would be my last great chance of winning something really important.

You're still with Udinese, though.

Yes, I wanted to be settled in the season before the World Cup. I wanted to play every Sunday. Here I feel important, I'm not just an ordinary player. And if we win the League, I'll remain here.

Are you really worth £10million?

Of course! Without the two goals I scored in the Euro 96 Final my value would have been very much lower, but one goal can change your life.

Do you regret having burst into prominence so late in your career?

Why? Do you think regrets are useful? OK, I made some mistakes but looking back is useless. When I joined Ascoli I realised I had failed.

Why did you go there?

Inter had bought me for £1million but Klinsmann was the main striker there, so they lent me to Ascoli. I thought it was right, that it would allow me to show my talent. But I was wrong. The following year, Inter didn't want me back, so I stayed at Ascoli and in my last season there I scored 20 goals.

'Now I'm 29 joining a great team would be my last chance of winning something really important'

During Euro 96 you stayed on the bench for five matches. If you hadn't played in the Final would you have spoken to Berti Vogts?

Yes, I would have asked him for an explanation. On the other hand, I had only just come into the squad, and made my debut just a few months before Euro 96. The other players were more experienced.

Can you explain why Fredi Bobic scores so many goals for Stuttgart and not for the national team?

Stuttgart are an attack-minded side and the whole team plays for Bobic. In fact, the Bundesliga is the most offensive League. The national team does things differently; we play a counter-attacking game.

How do you get on with Jurgen Klinsmann?

There are no problems at all. He sets the pace of the game; I follow his moves.

On the mark...Oliver Bierhoff

Do you think Matthias Sammer could become a good coach?

Yes, I think so. And the fact that he replaced Lothar Matthaus in the national team was important.

Were Germany the best team at Euro 96?

Of course! Perhaps we weren't that spectacular, but we were very consistent, we wanted to win.

What was the most significant factor behind your win?

Concentration.

Which defender had the best tournament?

Jurgen Kohler. You cannot shake him off.

Name a German star of the future.

Lars Ricken will certainly become a great player.

Before Christian Ziege's arrival, you were the only German playing in Italy. Why?

Well, a wave of players returned to Germany, others were just about to retire. That left me on my own.

Can you also explain why everyone is rushing to play in England?

Some players do it for money, others because they aren't satisfying everybody in Italy any more, still others do it to experience something new. As for me, I'd like to go there. During Euro 96 I noticed a wonderful atmosphere.

How about a spell at Manchester United?

I'd like to play at Old Trafford very much. The Reds are a great team with wonderful fans.

Today, it's hard to find strikers such as you, strikers playing in the classical style.

Yes, very hard, because today everyone focuses on speed. I really run a lot. I'm often exhausted. With two strikers, things are easier and nicer.

What is your greatest quality?

Being in the area at the right moment.

What is your worst failing?

Lack of agility.

What will you do when your playing career is over?

I'll stay in football, but it's already too early to make such plans. For the moment, I only think about Udinese and the World Cup.

• *For more on Bierhoff and Udinese's bid for the Scudetto, see page 26.*

THE MEN WHO MATTER

Bora Milutinovic

Osasu Obayiuwana talks to Nigeria's fifth coach in five years

Past master...Bora Milutinovic's fourth appearance at finals will bring a share of the record with Parreira

AFTER managing Mexico, Costa Rica and the USA at the last three World Cups, coping with the demands of the international game is nothing new to Bora Milutinovic. But managing Nigeria at the 1998 finals will be his biggest test yet.

With four managers passing through the revolving doors of Nigeria's FA in the past four years – making the job the most unsafe in world football – Serb coach Milutinovic will have to cope with a notorious officialdom as well as the hopes and dreams of the West African country's 100 million people, who believe that the 1996 Olympic Champions can bring home football's ultimate prize.

WORLD SOCCER: How did you get the job?
BORA MILUTINOVIC: It was very simple. I was free and the Nigerian FA was looking for a coach. We agreed on terms and signed a contract.

What was your gut response to the FA's overtures, considering that you have never worked in Africa before?
There is a first time for everything. I have been aware of the potential of the Nigerian team for quite a while. They had a very good team at the last World Cup and we all know what they did at the last Olympics. They have top players around the world and the time has come for Nigeria do something special in the World Cup.

Nigerians passionately believe that the team can win the World Cup. How do deal with that kind of pressure?
With the top quality players we have at our disposal, we have a chance of realising the fans' ambitions. Working hard and planning properly is the key.

How familiar are you with the players?
So far, I have talked with just a few of them. I went to Milan to meet Taribo West and Nwankwo Kanu and I intend to see the others as well. There isn't much time to prepare for the finals, so I hope to get my plans across to players as I travel to meet them.

There is a feeling that some European-based players have become cocky and difficult to manage. How will you cope with this?
I will try to explain what I want to do and I hope that the players will have no problems with my way of doing things. I believe that Nigerian players in the top European leagues will display a professional attitude when working with me and understand the importance of having a good spirit in the team. But one thing is clear. I am a manager with a clear idea of what I want to do and how I want to do it.

'The most important thing is for the Nigerian FA to give me organisational support'

You might not have all the players together in a training camp until the end of the European season. Will this be enough time to prepare the team for the World Cup?
I am aware of the constraints but this should only be a minor problem because there are so many top quality players in the team. I think my experience with the Costa Rican team [at the 1990 World Cup finals in Italy] is the best answer to this question. We had only one month to prepare and yet we were able to achieve something – and that team did not have anything like the great potential of Nigeria.

Your contract lasts only until the end of the World Cup finals. Can we assume that you have no intention of taking up a permanent job with Nigeria?
This is a matter for the future. Depending on how we perform in the finals, I can enter into subsequent negotiations with the FA. But the most important thing for me at the moment is to ensure that the team gets results that reflect its wealth of talent.

You and Carlos Alberto Parreira are the only coaches to lead four different countries to four different World Cup finals. What does this record mean to you?
I am honoured to share this unique feat and I hope that my fourth World Cup will be the greatest yet.

Is France 98 your toughest test?
No coaching job is easy but I always relish the challenge of achieving things with a new team.

Will you be working with Nigerian assistants or will you bring in your own team?
I will work with two Nigerians for their experience but I will be also be bringing in associates of mine.

Nigeria were banned from the last African Nations Cup. Will friendlies provide enough competition to get the team in shape?
Yes. The four or five games will be enough. The most important thing is to have fit players and for the FA to give me organisational support. Bora does not play the football. I am only the coach.

You are the fifth manager in five years. With the last four each claiming that the FA did not respect its contractual obligations, what makes you think that you are going to have things any easier?
When people put their signatures to a contract, they should respect it. I never think that people who sign a contract should have any intention to dishonour it.

What can you achieve with Nigeria?
You have a dream and then you have reality. That is a very different thing. We have an excellent squad of players, now I must make an excellent team.

Alan Shearer

England's captain is back from injury and ready for France, reports Kevin Palmer

STEVENAGE BOROUGH'S Broadhall Way stadium is hardly known outside the four corners of the rural county of Hertfordshire, just north of London.

But to England captain Alan Shearer, the ground was his mecca for one balmy day in January. Stevenage was the setting for Shearer's first full match back after an injury which many said threatened his career.

Within three minutes of the kick-off, Shearer's familiar goal celebration, wheeling away from goal with a one-handed salute, was back on the nation's TV screens.

Shearer was back, although an eventual 1-1 draw against non-League opposition was hardly the scenario Shearer had envisaged as he set out on the long road to recovery last August. The ankle injury in a pre-season friendly had dealt a savage blow to the hopes of club and country.

Shearer is England's comic book goalscoring hero, yet is also a character who excels in being economical with the truth.

"I have no chance of playing before March,"

'Sitting in the stands is no fun. When it came to the qualifying decider in Rome, that hurt'

was his verdict just days before he took to the field for his first substitute appearance against Bolton on January 17.

"I can't see myself being called up for the international against Chile," were his words hours before returning to Glenn Hoddle's squad for the Wembley friendly against the South Americans.

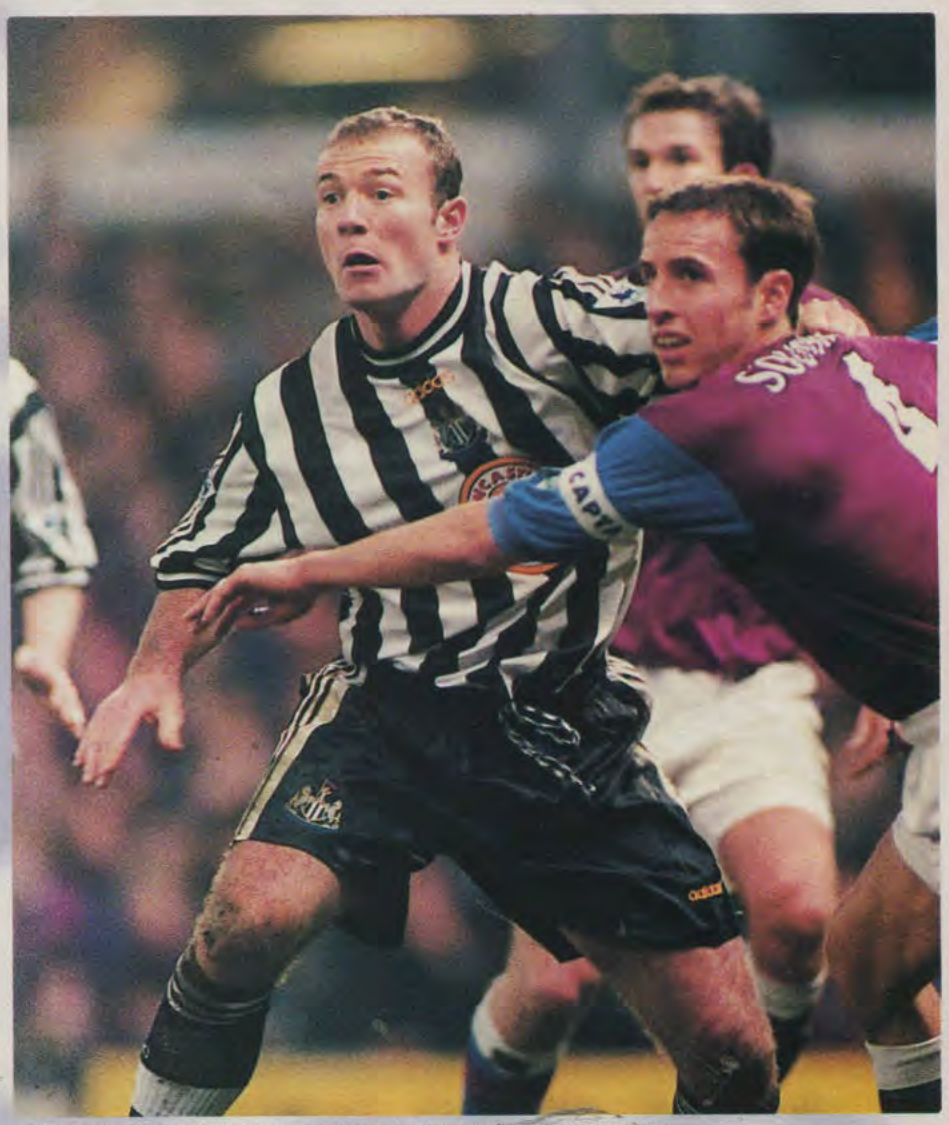
It seems that 27-year-old Shearer gets a curious kick out of deceiving media and fans alike, in a similar fashion to his ever difficult club manager Kenny Dalglish, the master of the football cliché who entered into the Shearer conspiracy over the player's early return.

However, it was always likely that Shearer would return long before the March deadline given his previous history of swift recovery from lengthy injury lay-offs.

"Newcastle have been having a bad season and I was desperate to play," says Shearer. "Sitting in the stands is no fun for any player. When it came to watching England's World Cup qualifying decider against Italy in Rome, that hurt. I had done so much to get us into a position to qualify, and not being there to finish it off was hard to accept. As was watching Newcastle in the Champions League against the likes of Barcelona.

"It is a relief to be back. You have doubts along the way as to whether it will ever happen, that is only natural. The only thing that is missing now is the match sharpness, but that will come by playing games."

Shearer is an intensely private man who manages to keep his personal life out of the papers with remarkable success. On the field, his talent is unquestionable. His three seasons at Blackburn reaped an incredible 112 goals in 138 League games, as well as League championship success in 1995. Then there is the captain's armband entrusted to him by coach Glenn Hoddle.



Action man...Alan Shearer takes the strain for Newcastle against Aston Villa

"Selecting a captain is all about what he gives to a team and I don't just mean on the field," says Hoddle. "You need someone who will put trepidation into the minds of the opposition and who also commands the respect of his team-mates. I am confident that Alan Shearer has all those qualities."

The captaincy is an honour Shearer relishes. "If I can be England captain at the World Cup it will mean a lot to me," he says. "There are not many people who get the chance to captain their country and it has certainly been one of the highlights of my career.

"The important thing for me was to carry on scoring goals and show that the burden of captaincy was not going to affect me. And I have managed to achieve that aim."

It is amazing to think that a little more than 18 months ago, the same members of the English press who are now hailing Shearer's return were calling for the player to be omitted from the national side. A run of 12 internationals without a goal immediately cast doubts over Shearer's ability to produce at the highest level, but five goals at Euro 96 silenced the critics.

"Euro 96 was important for me, but it was not all about Alan Shearer," he retorts. "My goals shut a few people up and that was nice. But it was about the England team and we did ourselves proud. But for a penalty kick, we would have gone on to win the competition.

"What it did prove is that we are a match for the top sides in the world and we have the chance to prove that once again this summer in France."

With Shearer back, realising that dream seems a little more feasible.

THE MEN WHO MATTER

Andy Herzog

Nick Bidwell on the playmaker who is a key to Austria's World Cup hopes

AUSTRIAN fans will be hoping for national team midfield general Andy Herzog to be on his toes this summer. After suffering more than three years of discomfort from a toe complaint, a battered foot at last went under the surgeon's knife last autumn. He was expected to be out of action for at least five or six months, but Werder Bremen playmaker Herzog should have recovered in time to travel to the World Cup.

Little wonder that Austria manager Herbert Prohaska is keeping a close eye on his key man's medical bulletins. A match-fit and 100 per cent healthy Herzog is absolutely essential to the team's hopes of at least forcing their way into the knockout stages.

Prohaska and Herzog have not always made up a mutual admiration society. A couple of years ago Prohaska swore never to pick Herzog again after he had preferred to play for Werder Bremen rather than join the Austrian squad for a Euro 96 qualifying match in Dublin.

Coach and rebel later settled their disagreement. The plain truth of the matter was that Prohaska simply could not do without the world-class talent of Herzog, the midfielder whose craft and left-footed shooting power give an extra dimension to an Austrian side high on honest toilers but low on genuine quality. Indeed, it is hard to see how Austria would have qualified for France 98 without Herzog's creativity, flair and ability to score match-winning goals.

"This is an Austrian team which sticks together and fights to the end," declares skipper and striker Toni Polster. "But you have to underline the major contribution Andy made to our qualifying campaign. Every one of his goals was priceless – the one which gave us victory at home to Latvia and the winners in both games against Sweden.

"His brilliant effort in the Sweden game in Vienna was typical of him, elegantly making space and beating their keeper with an unstoppable shot.

"If there's a player with a better left foot in Europe than Andy, I haven't seen him."

Herzog certainly owes it to himself and Austrian supporters to be considerably more influential in France than during his previous World Cup finals mission eight years ago. He entered Italia 90 as a would-be world-beater, only to make next to no impact in an impoverished Austrian line-up.

This time, however, Herzog is confident that an entirely different World Cup scenario will be played out. He says: "Italia 90 came and went without anyone really noticing me or the Austrian team as a whole. But not for a second am I contemplating falling flat on my face in France.

"I've matured enormously both as a person and as a player since Italia 90. I've had a great deal of success in the Bundesliga with Werder Bremen and I think I've regularly proved myself at the highest level.

"I'm optimistic about our prospects. Qualifying from a group containing Italy, Cameroon and Chile should be easily within our scope, and I'm looking forward to playing my part."

Priceless contribution...Andy Herzog was invaluable to Austria during qualification for France 98

PRO-FILE
Club Werder Bremen (Ger)
Country Austria
Born September 10, 1968, in Vienna
Previous clubs Admira Wacker, First Vienna, Rapid Vienna, Werder Bremen (Ger), Bayern Munich (Ger)
International debut April 1988, v Greece
International caps 64 (13 goals)
Honours Austrian League 1987, 1988 (Rapid); Austrian Cup 1987 (Rapid); German League 1993 (Bremen); German Cup 1994 (Bremen); UEFA Cup 1996 (Bayern Munich)

'If there's a player with a better left foot in Europe than Andy, I haven't seen him' – Toni Polster

Victor Hugo Aristizabal

Tim Vickery on the Colombian who brings out the best in Asprilla

PRO-FILE
Club Sao Paulo (Bra)
Country Colombia
Born December 9, 1971, in Medellin
Previous clubs Nacional (two spells), Valencia (Spa)
International caps 39 (5 goals)
Honours Colombian League 1991, 1994

THE HEADLINES may go to Asprilla, but Colombians are well aware of the importance of the other half of their A-team attack.

With his intelligent movement, unselfish running and first-time passing, Victor Hugo Aristizabal is the kind of striker who specialises in making his partner look good.

It's the same story for club and country. At Sao Paulo his understanding with Dodo provided the platform for the young Brazilian to go from reserve to international in six months. With Colombia, it's alongside Aristizabal that Asprilla has looked most effective.

Other candidates to partner Asprilla include a pair of 1994 veterans, the waspish Anthony De Avila and the burly Ivan Valenciano. The new generation also has thrown up the talented Hamilton Ricard and River Plate's recent signing, Juan Pablo Angel. But the figures tell the story. Five of Asprilla's six goals in World Cup qualification came in games when Aristizabal was alongside him.

"Obviously I like scoring when the opportunities arise," says 26-year-old Aristizabal. "But Asprilla has such pace that when we play together he's more the scorer and I'm the provider."

This mobility was sadly lacking from Colombia's play in USA 94, when they arrived as one of the favourites only to crash out in the first round. After coming through the 1992 Olympics and making his full debut a year later, Aristizabal was part of the squad, but one of only three outfield players who were not called upon.

"I don't really know why everything went so wrong in '94," he reflects. "But," repeating the mantra of all of his colleagues, "I'm sure that the experience will help us give a better account of ourselves in France."

Colombia's World Cup opener gives them the chance to gain revenge on Romania, who put them on the path to ruin four years ago. Aristizabal is sure that lessons have been learned.

"We know that we have to adapt our game, because modern football is so fast, but we are not going to play in a European style, all counter-attacks and quick moves. We are South Americans – we like to put our foot on the ball and knock it around."

After Romania, Colombia face Tunisia before ending the first round against England, "our most difficult opponents in the group". Aristizabal is well aware that a player of his style could be an important factor in that game. "England's marking is very tight, so it's going to be important for our forwards to be mobile."

Just as Aristizabal can shake off his marker, Colombia have rid themselves of the pressures of going into the World Cup as one of the favourites, and seem to be enjoying the low-key approach.

"I'm sure England will be one of the strongest teams in the Cup," Aristizabal concludes, "but we are on our way, slowly but surely. Who knows? Maybe we can do better this time."

Great provider...Aristizabal

Saeed Al-Owairan

The skilful Saudi forward is all set to make up for lost time, says Nick Bidwell

Back in the reckoning...Owairan

SAUDI ARABIA'S Saeed Al-Owairan is back in the national squad after an 18-month ban for 'immoral acts', and he has set his sights on a summer of personal rehabilitation at France 98.

Owairan, the gazelle-like attacker who scored that memorable individual goal against Belgium at USA 94, could have had no complaints about his lengthy suspension. He was caught at a drinks party in late 1995, and had flouted strict Islamic law on alcohol and illicit relationships with women.

To be forced out of the game for a year and a half was bad enough for the 1994 Asian Player of the Year, the man known as the 'Desert Maradona'. But even more galling was that the Saudis hardly seemed to miss him.

While he kicked his heels the national team continued to prosper, defeating the United Arab Emirates on penalties to take the 1996 Asian Cup and then securing a spot at their second consecutive World Cup finals.

With both Al-Jaber and Al-Mehalel cutting a dash up front, it seemed quite possible that Owairan would be cast adrift permanently.

Not so. As far as the Saudi management was concerned, Owairan's slate had been wiped clean, and on returning last summer with his club side Al Shabab – where he has played since 1987 – his form was sufficiently impressive to earn an international recall.

He started all three of his country's games at the Confederations Cup in Riyadh, and although obviously rusty after his enforced lay-off, he did at least provide a few flashes of the talent which so caught the eye at the World Cup in America. His technique and long-striding, elusive running had not disappeared.

The new Saudi coach, Brazilian Carlos Alberto Parreira, could use the experience and extravagant skills of a match-fit Owairan. The dilemma facing Parreira is where should the player on parole line up? As an out-and-out attacker or in a withdrawn role on the left-side of midfield, giving him the opportunity to do what he does best – run at defences?

"I made a mistake and paid for it," admits Owairan. "Now I must concentrate on making sure the future is kind to me.

"I couldn't be happier to be playing again for Al Shabab and Saudi Arabia, and even though I'm far from a novice, I certainly have not given up hope of achieving a lot more in the game.

"I'm hopeful I will be with the national team in France. To take part in one World Cup is a tremendous honour. To play in two would make me a very proud man."

Owairan, now 30, was frustrated by his federation's refusal to sanction a move to a club in Portugal or Spain after USA 94, when offers of £2.5million were reported. Now he is aware that his ambition of becoming the first Saudi professional in Europe probably has passed him by.

Instead, younger men such as Al-Jaber, Al-Mehalel or defender Hussain Sulaimani could be allowed to migrate if the Saudis perform well in France.

Owairan will have to make do with the challenge of his international return – and what better stage to make it upon than a World Cup finals?

PRO-FILE
Club Al Shabab
Country Saudi Arabia
Born August 19, 1967, in Riyadh
International caps 57 (25 goals)

Zagallo's Gold Cup plans tarnished

MARIO ZAGALLO was given an enormous pineapple last month. That is the Brazilian way of saying that he was handed a huge problem by somebody else (in this case the CBF) and told to solve it.

The problem in question was the CONCACAF Gold Cup, which Brazil once again took part in as guests. Zagallo usually avoids direct criticism of his employees, but there were plenty of hints that he would rather not be taking part.

At least three-quarters of the players expected to make Brazil's World Cup squad are with European clubs, who are obliged to release Brazilian players for five full international friendlies a year. The Gold Cup is recognised as an official competition, but this does not apply to Brazil because they are appearing as guests.

Brazil have some more friendlies lined up in April and May when their opponents will be considerably stronger than Guatemala, Jamaica and El Salvador, their first round Gold Cup rivals.

Zagallo, quite naturally, wants to use his best players in the April and May games and wanted to take a reserve squad to the Gold Cup. No problem there except that commercial pressures demand that he took along at least a few of Brazil's top players.

Just to complicate matters further, the CBF then agreed with local sides that Zagallo could pick only two players per Brazilian club. The resulting squad was a motley hotchpotch which bore no resemblance to the squad Brazil are likely to take to France. Portuguesa defender Cesar, Santos midfielder Marcos Assuncao and Corinthians full-back-cum-midfielder Silvinho were all uncapped.

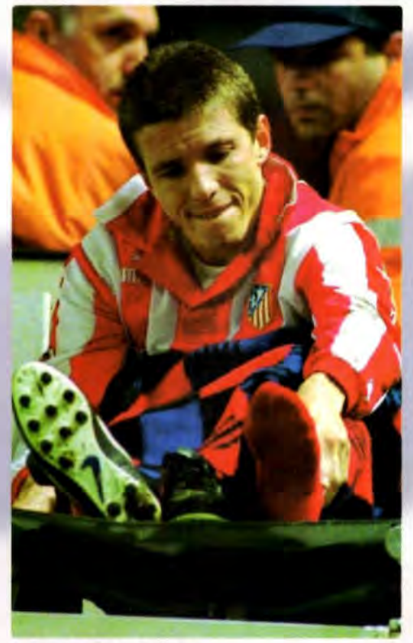
The big news was Edmundo's release from the doghouse. Edmundo, arguably Brazil's top player in the second half of 1997, had been sighing and looking forlornly towards the stars ever since he elbowed a Bolivian player in the face during the Copa America final in June. The referee missed the incident but a furious Zagallo did not and took Edmundo off immediately.

Zagallo had been due to forgive Edmundo in time for November's friendly with Wales, but four days before the squad was announced, Edmundo got himself sent off in a club game following another elbowing incident. He went on to finish 1997 with seven red cards.

Brian Homewood

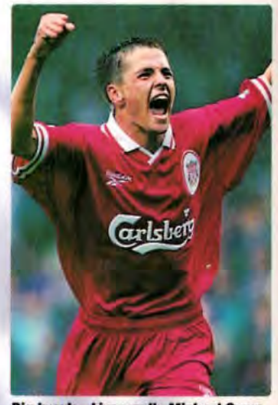
● Bayern Munich striker Giovane Elber was also called into Brazil's Gold Cup squad – his first national team call-up.

● Midfielder Juninho is likely to miss the World Cup after breaking a fibula and damaging ankle ligaments in a Spanish League game for Atletico Madrid. After undergoing surgery to have a steel plate inserted in his leg, the former Boro player said: "I'm very depressed. I only hope the operation went well."



Broken leg No 1...Juninho

SQUADS



Big break...Liverpool's Michael Owen

Owen and Dublin called up

ENGLAND's squad for the friendly against Chile on February 11 saw the first-time inclusion of two in-form strikers, Coventry's Dion Dublin and Michael Owen of Liverpool.

Full squad: Nigel Martyn (Leeds Utd), Tim Flowers (Blackburn); Gary Neville, Phil Neville (both Man Utd), Graeme Le Saux (Chelsea), Andy Hinchcliffe (Sheff Wed), Tony Adams, Martin Keown (both Arsenal), Gareth Southgate (Aston Villa), Sol Campbell (Tottenham); Paul Ince, Steve McManaman (both Liverpool), Paul Gascoigne (Rangers), David Beckham, Nicky Butt, Paul Scholes (all Man Utd), David Batty, Rob Lee (both Newcastle); Teddy Sheringham, Andy Cole (both Man Utd), Alan Shearer (Newcastle), Michael Owen (Liverpool), Dion Dublin (Coventry), Les Ferdinand (Tottenham).

GERMANY coach Berti Vogts made one notable omission from his 40-strong provisional World Cup squad when he left out Matthias Sammer. The Dortmund player has been troubled by injury all season but he could play a part in France should he regain match fitness in time.

Full squad: Oliver Kahn (Bayern Munich), Stefan Klos (Borussia Dortmund), Andreas Kopke (Marseille), Jens Lehmann (Schalke); Markus Babbel, Thomas Helmer (both Bayern Munich), Jurgen Kohler, Stefan Reuter (both Borussia Dortmund), Thomas Linke, Olaf Thon (both Schalke), Jens Nowotny, Carsten Ramelow, Christian Worns (all Bayer Leverkusen), Marco Rehmer (Hansa Rostock), Thomas Schneider (Stuttgart); Jorg Albertz (Rangers), Mario Basler, Dietmar Hamann, Christian Nerlinger, Mehmet Scholl, Thomas Strunz, Michael Tarnat (all Bayern Munich), Marco Bode, Dieter Eilts (both Werder Bremen), Steffen Freund, Jorg Heinrich, Andy Moller, Lars Ricken (all Borussia Dortmund), Thomas Hassler (Karlsruhe), Jens Jeremies (1860 Munich), Sven Kmetsch (Hamburg), Dariusz Wosz (Bochum), Christian Ziege (Milan); Oliver Bierhoff (Udinese), Fredi Bobic (Stuttgart), Carsten Jancker (Bayern Munich), Ulf Kirsten (Bayer Leverkusen), Jurgen Klinsmann (Tottenham), Stefan Kuntz (Arminia Bielefeld), Olaf Marschall (Kaiserslautern).

JAPAN's national team manager, Takeshi Okada, added several new faces to his 29-member squad for a training camp in Australia. "I am not worrying about whether they are youngsters or veterans," he said. "The main aim is to win matches this summer." The newcomers include 20-year-old Kashima Antlers striker Atsushi Yanagisawa, the 1997 J.League Rookie of the Year.

Full squad: Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi, Nobuyuki Kojima, Seigo Narazaki, Hayato Okanaka; Masami Ihara, Norio Omura, Yutaka Akita, Tadashi Nakamura, Naoki Soma, Akira Narahashi, Toshihide Saito, Eisuke Nakanishi, Hideto Suzuki; Tsuyoshi Kitazawa, Motohiro Yamaguchi, Yasuto Honda, Hiroaki Morishima, Hiroshi Nanami, Toshihiro Hattori, Tadatoshi Masuda, Takashi Hirano, Hidetoshi Nakata, Syunsuke Nakamura; Kazuyoshi Miura, Masashi Nakayama, Wagner Lopes, Masayuki Okano, Shoji Jo, Atsushi Yanagisawa.

NIGERIA took 20-strong squad to the Carlsberg Cup in Hong Kong (report, page 46) which included many players coach Bora Milutinovic had never before seen in action.

Full squad: Willy Okpara (Orlando Pirates), Ike Shorounmu (FC Zurich), Andrew Aikhuomogbe (Katsina Utd); Uche Okafor (Kansas City), Alhassan Mohammed, Ganiyu Ajide (both Julius Berger), Ajibade Babalade (Korea Cheetah), Patrick Paschal (Genclerbirligi), Kingsley Obiekwu (Go Ahead Eagles); Festus Okougha (Sparta Rotterdam), Steven Musa (Saarbrucken), Karibe Ojigwe (Kaiserslautern), Emmanuel Ebiede (Heerenveen), Jero Siakpere (Reggiana), Garba Mohammed (Kano Pillars); Gabriel Okolosi (Waldorf Mannheim), Chukwu Ndukwe (Mamelodi Sundowns), Kenneth Zeigbo (Legia Dawoo), Henry Onwuzuruike (Heerenveen), Edith Agoye (no club).

SOUTH AFRICA's squad for their COSAFA Cup first-round tie against Namibia was: Brian Baloyi (Kaizer Chiefs), Paul Evans (Supersport Utd), Simon Gopane (Bloemfontein Celtic); Mark Fish (Bolton), Willem Jackson (Orlando Pirates), Themba Mnguni (Mamelodi Sundowns), Aaron Mokoena (Jomo Cosmos), David Nyathi (St Gallen), Andrew Rabutla (PAOK Salonika); John Moeti, Dumisa Ngobe, Brandon Silent (all Orlando Pirates), Quiton Fortune (Atletico Madrid), Brian Sebapole (Jomo Cosmos), Helman Mkhalele (Kayserispor), Jabu Mnguni (Vaal Professionals), Thabo Mooki (Kaizer Chiefs); Brendan Augustine (LASK Linz), Thabang Lebese (Kaizer Chiefs), Phil Masinga (Bari), Benni McCarthy (Ajax), Pollen Ndlanya (Bursaspor).

YUGOSLAVIA overcame **TUNISIA** 3-0 in a friendly in Tunis, with two goals coming from Slavisa Jokanovic.

The full squad for the game was: Dragoje Lekovic (Sporting Gijon), Sasa Petrovic (Elche); Zoran Mirkovic (Atalanta), Sinisa Mihajlovic (Sampdoria), Goran Djorovic (Celta Vigo), Miroslav Djukic (Valencia), Nisa Saveljic (Bordeaux), Risto Vidakovic (Betis); Slavisa Jokanovic (Tenerife), Vladimir Jugovic (Lazio), Albert Nadj (Betis), Dejan Govedarica (Lecce), Miroslav Stevic (1860 Munich), Ljubinko Drulovic (Porto), Branko Brnovic (Espanyol); Predrag Mijatovic (Real Madrid), Savo Milosevic (Aston Villa), Darko Kovacevic (Real Sociedad), Vladan Lukic (Metz).

WARM-UP GAMES ARRANGED TO DATE

Argentina: Norway (Feb 19, Mendoza), Ukraine (Feb 23, Mar del Plata), Russia (Feb 26, Rosario), Bulgaria (March 10, Buenos Aires), Romania (April 19, Bucharest), Rep of Ireland (April 22, Dublin), Yugoslavia (April 26, Belgrade), Brazil (April 29, Rio), Cameroon (May 14, Buenos Aires), Chile (May 19).

Austria: Hungary (March 25, Vienna), USA (April 22, Vienna), Tunisia (May 27, Vienna), Liechtenstein (June 2, Vienna).

Belgium: USA (Feb 25, Brussels), Norway (March 25, Brussels), Romania (April 22, Brussels), Paraguay (May 22, Brussels), France (May 27, Casablanca), England (May 29, Casablanca), Colombia (June 3, Brussels).

Brazil: Germany (March 25, Stuttgart), Argentina (April 29, Rio).

Bulgaria: Argentina (March 10, Buenos Aires), Croatia (April 22, Zagreb), Croatia (April 25, Sofia).

Cameroon: Argentina (May 14, Buenos Aires), Holland (May 27, Arnhem), Luxembourg (June 1, Luxembourg), Denmark (June 5, Copenhagen).

Chile: Japan (April 29, Tokyo), Argentina (May 19), Uruguay (May 22, Santiago), USA, Scotland, Paraguay (May, US Cup), Tunisia (June 2, Montelimar).

Colombia: Mexico (March 11, San Diego), Germany (May 30, Frankfurt), Belgium (June 3, Brussels).

Croatia: Czech Rep (March 25, Prague), Bulgaria (April 22, Zagreb), Bulgaria (April 25, Sofia), Slovakia (May 28, Pula).

Denmark: Scotland (March 25, Glasgow), Norway (April 22, Copenhagen), Sweden (May 28, Malmo), Cameroon (June 5, Copenhagen).

England: Switzerland (March 25), Saudi Arabia (May 23, Wembley), Morocco (May 27, Casablanca), Belgium (May 29, Casablanca).

France: Norway (Feb 25, Marseille), Russia (March 25, Moscow), Sweden (April 22, Stockholm), Belgium (May 27, Casablanca), Morocco (May 29, Casablanca), Finland (June 5, Helsinki).

Germany: Oman (Feb 18, Muscat), Saudi Arabia (Feb 22, Riyadh), Brazil (March 25, Stuttgart), Nigeria (April 22, Cologne), Finland (May 27, Helsinki), Colombia (May 30, Frankfurt), Luxembourg (June 5, Kaiserslautern).

Holland: USA (Feb 21, Miami), Mexico (Feb 24, Miami), Cameroon (May 27, Arnhem), Paraguay (May 31, Rotterdam), Nigeria (June 5, Amsterdam).

Iran: none announced.

Italy: Paraguay (April 22, Rome).

Jamaica: Nigeria (Feb 22, Kingston), South Korea (May 16 and 19, Seoul).

Japan: Australia (Feb 15, Adelaide), South Korea (March 1, Yokohama), Hong Kong (March 4, Yokohama), China (March 7, Tokyo), South Korea (April 1, Seoul), Chile (April 29, Tokyo), Mexico (June 3, Geneva).

Mexico: Holland (Feb 24, Miami), Colombia (March 11, San Diego), Paraguay (March 18, Mexico City), Rep of Ireland (May 23, Dublin), Austria (May 27, Vienna), Japan (June 3, Geneva).

Morocco: Wales (March, Casablanca), England (May 27, Casablanca), France (May 29, Casablanca).

Nigeria: Jamaica (Feb 22, Kingston), Ghana (March 25, Accra), Germany (April 22, Cologne), Yugoslavia (May 30, Belgrade), Holland (June 5, Amsterdam).

Norway: Argentina (Feb 19, Mendoza), France (Feb 25, Marseille), Belgium (March 25, Brussels), Denmark (April 22, Copenhagen), Saudi Arabia (May 27, Molde).

Paraguay: USA (March 14, San Diego), Mexico (March 18, Mexico City), Italy (April 22, Rome), South Korea (May 9, Seoul), Belgium (May 22, Brussels), USA, Scotland, Chile (May, US Cup), Holland (May 31, Rotterdam), Romania (June 3, Bucharest).

Romania: Argentina (April 19, Bucharest), Belgium (April 22, Brussels), Northern Ireland (May 30, Bucharest), Paraguay (June 3, Bucharest).

Saudi Arabia: Germany (Feb 22, Riyadh), England (May 23, Wembley), Norway (May 27, Molde).

Scotland: Denmark (March 25, Glasgow), Finland (April 22, Helsinki), Chile, Paraguay, USA (May, US Cup).

South Africa: none announced.

South Korea: Japan (March 1, Yokohama), Hong Kong (March 4, Yokohama), China (March 7, Tokyo), Japan (April 1, Seoul), Paraguay (May 9, Seoul), Jamaica (May 16 and 19, Seoul), Czech Rep (May 27, Seoul), China (June 4, Seoul).

Spain: Sweden (March 25, Vigo), Northern Ireland (May 27, Santander).

Tunisia: Austria (May 27, Vienna), Chile (June 2, Montelimar), Wales (June 6, Tunis).

United States: Holland (Feb 21, Miami), Belgium (Feb 25, Brussels), Paraguay (March 14, San Diego), Austria (April 22, Vienna), Chile, Scotland, Paraguay (May, US Cup).

Yugoslavia: Rep of Ireland (April 22, Dublin), Argentina (April 26, Belgrade), Nigeria (May 30, Belgrade).

Broken leg No 2...Ciro Ferrara

IN BRIEF

Ferrara highly doubtful

ITALY look almost certain to lose Juventus defender Ciro Ferrara this summer after he broke a leg in a League game against Lecce.

BELGIUM's national squad has been in dispute with the country's soccer union over bonus payments for warm-up and World Cup finals games.

CAMEROON beat Angola 1-0 in a pre-African Nations Cup friendly.

JAMAICA drew 0-0 with Sweden in Kingston after a tour of Brazil which saw them lose 3-0 against Flamengo in Rio and 4-0 to Corinthians of Sao Paulo.

● Midfielder Robbie Earle is likely to miss several warm-up games for Jamaica after injuring a knee in the warm-up before Wimbledon's FA Cup tie at Huddersfield.

● The lifting of Jamaica's sporting sanctions imposed on Nigeria in March 1996 looks likely to allow a friendly international between the two countries to go ahead on February 22.

A CAPACITY crowd of 80,000 saw **MOROCCO** overcome a first-half own goal to beat Angola 2-1. The game in Casablanca was settled by goals from Mustapha Hadji and Abdelkrim Hadrioui.

NORWAY captain Kjetil Rekdal broke a leg playing for Hertha Berlin and will be out of action for two months. He should be back in time for the summer's finals. Lars Bohinen has also been out with injury and is struggling to gain a first team place with Blackburn.

SOUTH KOREA beat Egypt on penalties after a 1-1 draw to lift the King's Cup in Thailand. They overcame the hosts 2-0 to reach the Final, while Egypt dispatched **DENMARK** by the same scoreline. The Scandinavians securedthird place with a 3-0 victory over Thailand.

THE **USA** beat Cuba 3-0 in a Gold Cup first-round game. A week before, the Americans had won 1-0 against Sweden in Orlando thanks to a Roy Wegerle goal.

Peter Neish

Bayer Leverkusen vs Real Madrid

Savio adds sparkle

Real Madrid's new arrivals make them serious contenders, writes Keir Radnedge

REAL MADRID will be relying on the Brazilian connection in order to turn a promising Champions League outfit into the victorious team which their glorious tradition demands.

Savio Bortolini sounds more like an Italian film director than soccer superstar, but Madrid's latest acquisition from South America promises to provide a samba sparkle which Jupp Heynckes and his team badly need against the German challenge of Bayer Leverkusen.

Savio Bortolini...promising start

Heynckes has only been in charge eight months but sometimes it must feel like eight years. Following Fabio Capello was always going to be a difficult task. The Italian coach commanded an almost mystical respect among the Madrid faithful just as his disciplinary demands sent shock waves through an overpaid, under-performing squad.

It did not help that Christian Panucci, the Italian right-back who followed Capello loyally from Milan then stayed on after his master's defection, missed three months in mid-season through injury. His return promises to bring a much-needed stability back into defence.

As far as Heynckes is concerned, it can't come soon enough. A prolific striker and European champion for West Germany in the 1970s, Heynckes has already seen newspaper speculation that Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz may bring in Arsene Wenger or Marcello Lippi next season. Wenger and Lippi are under contract at Arsenal and Juventus respectively, but even the merest hint that Sanz is considering a new hand on the tiller has given everyone the jitters.

Thus it was that Madrid tumbled out of the Spanish Cup to Second Division opposition, then went down 4-2 in the League to Real Sociedad with Roberto Carlos missing a penalty. Only Barcelona's simultaneous blunders allowed Madrid to stay on top of the Primera Liga, amid much whispering that Madrid's players were spending too much time at the wrong sort of clubs.

Croat centre-forward Davor Suker was furious at the allegations. He said: "I am always at home by 11pm. I think all our players are professionals and know their responsibilities to the team."

As Sanz said: "We don't need to hire someone to keep an eye on our players. Fans already do it. If they see a Real Madrid player having a late-night drink they are the first people to tell us.

"But this is just gossip. What was far more serious was being knocked out of the Cup early in the season and by a Second Division side. What worries me most is the dismal image and performance we are offering these days. This team cost a lot of money and something is not working."

Trying to change that has cost Madrid £10million this winter, money spent on the signings of Savio and fellow Brazilian striker Rodrigo – who has been loaned back to Flamengo – and also French midfielder Christian Karembeu.

Unknown quantity Savio is the spark who might make all the difference. Just 23, the Brazilian international should link up effectively with Roberto Carlos down the left and justify his status as the most expensive winter signing by a Spanish club at £8million. Savio made a lively debut as substitute against Betis and then scored his first goal for the club in a 1-1 draw against Atletico Madrid.

He certainly has the pedigree for the job, making his debut for Flamengo's youth team on the same day in 1989 that his hero, the great Zico, wore the famous No 10 shirt in the senior team for the last time. Six years on and Savio was pulling on the No 10 shirt himself, and keeping it despite the covetous eyes of team-mates such as Bebeto and Romario.

In 1996, offers from Spain began to arrive. But La Coruna and Tenerife grew impatient after Savio needed surgery for cartilage damage, and went shopping elsewhere. They soon regretted it. Savio scored a superb hat-trick against Sao Paulo in the Final of the CONMEBOL Gold Cup and Real Madrid bought an option.

Three months ago, amid signs that last season's Spanish champions were flagging, Madrid decided it was time to conclude the deal and bring the attacking midfielder to Estadio Bernabeu.

"Leverkusen?" Savio asked, when told of Madrid's opponents in the Champions League quarter-final draw. "I know nothing about them apart from the fact that they have a couple of Brazilians of their own [Emerson da Rosa and Paulo Rink]. I hope we are all on the winning side at the World Cup in France."

Kirsten back in business

Leverkusen and Germany striker Ulf Kirsten, the leading scorer in this season's Bundesliga, is free to play against Madrid after completing an eight-week ban. Kirsten was caught by TV cameras elbowing Schalke defender Thomas Linke in an off-the-ball incident during a goalless draw on December 6. However, Kirsten began the suspension as the German League shut up shop for the winter break and missed only one Bundesliga match.

HOW THEY LINE UP

BAYER LEVERKUSEN

During the winter break Leverkusen acquired Norwegian international midfielder Bent Skammelsrud from Rosenborg. He may have to settle for a place on the bench as coach Christoph Daum sticks with the side which qualified from Group F. Lehnhoff and Brazilian international Emerson (not to be confused with the ex-Boro player of the same name) add spice in midfield.

REAL MADRID

On paper, coach Jupp Heynckes has an impressive squad. The reality is that many of his key players have been underperforming (Raul, Suker) or struggling with injuries (Hierro, Mijatovic). Savio and Karembeu could kickstart a team which has not won away from home for eight matches. Heynckes is short on defensive cover, but does have attacking options (Suker, Morientes) on the bench.

Bayern Munich vs Borussia Dortmund

Kaiser: 'Watch out United'

The German threat is real, Franz Beckenbauer tells Keir Radnedge

HOW THEY LINE UP

BAYERN MUNICH

Against German opponents who play a similar 3-5-2 formation, there is a danger that the two teams will cancel each other out. Matthaus remains the driving force at the back, while Ghanaian Kuffour is keeping German international Babbel out of the side. Hamann and Nerlinger do the fetching and carrying in midfield, while Jancker and Elber's attacking partnership is maturing fast.

BORUSSIA DORTMUND

Injuries apart, the Dortmund line-up has a familiar look. Portuguese international Paulo Sousa joined Inter during the winter break, after struggling with the Dortmund injury jinx throughout his time in Germany. Feiersinger is the likely deputy for the injured Sammer, and Lars Ricken is developing into an exciting prospect alongside the experienced, if temperamental Moller.

Beckenbauer...frustrated with tie

FRANZ BECKENBAUER turns up his presidential nose when he considers the prospect of his Bayern Munich team taking on fellow Germans Borussia Dortmund in the quarter-finals of the UEFA Champions League.

"It's not that I don't appreciate what Dortmund have done," says Beckenbauer. "But I still believe that the greatest club competition in the world must be about glamour and excitement. We want to do well, of course, but we want to prove ourselves against the best teams in Europe. We went into the draw with Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juventus...and who comes out of the hat for us? Just Dortmund."

The two clubs have been rivals for most of the 1990s. Last year, Bayern won the German League but Dortmund – who they had deposed as domestic rulers – responded by winning the Champions League and then the World Club Cup.

Bayern were both World and European champions back in 1976, when Kaiser Franz was a player. So he knows the inner strength of a Dortmund team which – because of injuries, illness and tactical adjustments by new coach Nevio Scala – has not punched its weight in the German League this season.

"Do not misunderstand me," says Beckenbauer. "We do not take Dortmund lightly. Quite the opposite. Perhaps we will take them more seriously than we would have taken any of the foreign clubs left in the quarter-finals. But we know each other so well and when that happens you do not usually get good football. We are too familiar with each other's strengths and weaknesses.

"And because of our respective league positions, people will think that Bayern must win easily. This is not the case. We kick off on a level playing field."

Over at Old Trafford, interest in the all-German tie may be perfunctory. The mood in Manchester is one of self-confidence. The way the English media talk, Manchester United have this year's Champions League sewn up and are halfway to winning next year's as well.

It is not an opinion that Beckenbauer shares. He has a great respect for English football but he does not believe United are the invincibles they are portrayed as.

"A few weeks ago, I sat down and watched a video of the 1966 World Cup Final all the way through," he says. "It was the first time I had watched the whole match. I can say that, putting aside the issue of their third goal, England were the better team on the day and they deserved to win the World Cup.

"But I cannot necessarily say that about Manchester United today. Real Madrid could beat them, so could Juventus. They did it last year, after all. So did Dortmund. And remember, there are three German clubs in the Champions League now and only one English club. We can say with absolute confidence that there will be at least one German club in the semi-finals. You can't say that about an English club, can you?"

Whispers around the Bundesliga suggest that Bayern's team spirit may have been disturbed by the fact that midfielder Christian Nerlinger will transfer to Dortmund – for whom his father once played – at the end of the season, and also by reports that his engine-room partner Dieter Hamann is wanted by Atletico Madrid, and the certainty that forward Ruggiero Rizzitelli will return home to Italy at term's end.

Beckenbauer begs to differ: "This is not a problem. It's the way football is nowadays, since Bosman. Players have their contracts and have the right to change clubs. But it works both ways. They can leave us – and we can set up the signings of new players ourselves. For instance, at the end of the season we will be signing Jens Jeremies from Munich 1860 and Thomas Linke from Schalke.

"It's the same for other countries. In England, transfers are permitted throughout most of the season but no one suggests that this upsets teams."

Bayern reached the quarter-finals in style with plenty of goals along the way. At domestic level, too, they have been looking good, apart from their double defeat by leaders Kaiserslautern and a 4-2 setback against Leverkusen.

Coach Giovanni Trapattoni believes Bayern can win the treble of German League, German Cup and Champions League. He has certainly improved team spirit in a remarkably short space of time.

Last season, Trapattoni led Bayern to a record 14th title after a season marred by incessant squabbling and scandals. He even asked permission to leave for Roma but Beckenbauer would not consider it. Trapattoni accepted the decision and stayed – hoping for a quieter atmosphere than the one which earned Bayern the nickname FC Hollywood.

The 58-year-old Italian has been pleased with what he has seen so far this season. "I have coached many top teams and I know what it takes to win the big prizes," he says. "Those other teams not only had the strength but also the will to win. We too have that mentality."

Now the German press have a new nickname for Bayern: FC Harmony. Beat Dortmund in the quarter-finals, and it should stick.

Sammer career may be over

The career of Dortmund and Germany sweeper Matthias Sammer continues to be threatened by injury. The former European Footballer of the Year spent the winter break working intensely on his damaged left knee at a rehab clinic in Bavaria. Sammer, 30, has admitted to being deeply depressed after a series of injury setbacks over the past 20 months. He is highly doubtful for the quarter-final clash with Bayern, although national coach Berti Vogts still hopes to include Sammer in the German World Cup squad. "I am in contact with Sammer daily and I'm hoping he will play again for Dortmund," said Vogts. "I'm an optimist."

Juventus vs Kiev Dynamo

Dark horse from the East

Oleg Ratz talks to the legendary coach who plans a scare for the Italian champions

Human Dynamo...leading striker Andrei Shevchenko is confident of victory

YOU CAN'T avoid soccer in Ukraine at the moment. Although the National League packed up for its winter break, the media obsession with football has continued unabated.

The main topic, of course, is Kiev Dynamo, who carry the hopes of the nation with them when they face Juventus in the Champions League quarter-final.

The match heralds a return to the team's former glory days in the 1970s and 1980s when Valery Lobanovsky took Kiev Dynamo to two Cup-winners Cups and the UEFA Super Cup – a record still unmatched in Eastern Europe.

A living legend in Ukrainian football, Lobanovsky went back to his beloved club after seven years in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. Within six months, he had started working his magic once again and now eight Dynamo players are first-choice internationals, with the likes of Andrei Shevchenko and Sergei Rebrov sought by a host of top European clubs.

Dynamo president Grigory Sdurkis says that Lobanovsky creates a "psychology of winners" at the club, and the remarkable improvement in their performances and results is due directly to his coaching.

The task for Lobanovsky now is to re-establish the team as one of the best in Europe and to show its neighbours the supremacy of Ukrainian football.

"There's no other club in the whole of Eastern Europe that could match our record in Europe this season," says Lobanovsky. "The Russians are too weak to play at this level. The Croats and Romanians only sell players abroad so their domestic clubs are pitiful in Europe. And the Poles are long forgotten.

"Rightly or wrongly, Ukraine won't go to France 98. So let's concentrate on the Champions League, which is a miniature World Cup. Look at all those South Americans, Africans and Asians who play for top European clubs. What better way to re-establish Dynamo by showing our class in the Champions League?"

But despite such an incentive, Lobanovsky offers a word of caution to the optimists who predict that Kiev will reach the Champions League Final.

"I want to tell them not to expect us to win – it's not quite so simple. The patriotism of our players and fans isn't enough. We have to be realists."

Dynamo's performances in Europe, and Ukraine's failure to qualify for the World Cup, have led to an unprecedented appeal by national coach Jozef Szabo, who told reporters Lobanovsky should have taken the job because he's the only man who can bring the country success.

However, he is more interested in the Champions League. He says: "We all know who Juventus are, but I'm not certain whether the Italians know who we are. That could be to our advantage. I gather that the Italians think they are lucky with the draw. That works in our favour too. For Juve, we are dark horses from the East. They are glad they are not playing Manchester United or Real Madrid. Their approach will suit us.

"Let them think we are nobody from nowhere, let them think they will do us easily in both legs. Let them think that Ukrainians hibernate for the whole winter. Their ignorance is our twelfth player. And don't forget the first game is in Turin – another point in our favour."

Lobanovsky has great confidence in his players and has no time for the likes of Ronalsdo. "Big-name players get so far and become complacent. Look at Ronaldo. I saw him recently. He's still improving – which a player at his age should be. In the first half I saw he stood around and watched the ball until five minutes before the interval, when he scored.

"What would have happened if he hadn't? Just look at the criticism he has been getting lately. Why should a player be considered a star when he doesn't work? I wouldn't swap him for Shevchenko. I'm not even sure I would want Alan Shearer at Kiev. We made a video of him. He had 10 touches of the ball, nine times with his back to goal. No, I still prefer Shevchenko. Even when he isn't scoring goals he still puts in the work which makes him a valuable team player."

The Kiev players agree with their boss. Star striker Andrei Shevchenko says: "I want to be seen in Europe, and what better way than playing against quality opposition? I'll be up for victory in Turin. We know perfectly well what our aim is for this season, and we're going for it."

Sergei Rebrov agrees that the two games against the Italian outfit offer the perfect opportunity to make the rest of Europe sit up and take notice.

"We all want to show people that our quarter-final place is not down to luck," he says. "And Turin will see it first."

Davids makes his mark

Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids has made a significant impact since his mid-season move to Juventus from Milan. Davids, back in World Cup contention for Holland, has added bite to an already impressive midfield in Turin. Juve coach Marcelo Lippi says: "We knew we were buying a good player, but even I have been surprised by the quality and quantity of his play."

HOW THEY LINE UP

JUVENTUS

Marcello Lippi's preparations took a severe knock when Italy centre-back Ciro Ferrara broke a leg against Lecce. He may be forced into rethinking the 3-4-1-2 formation which he has employed in recent weeks, with Torricelli moving into a back four. Deschamps and Davids form the hub of a combative midfield base, from which Inzaghi, Zidane and Del Piero attack with stealth and invention.

KIEV DYNAMO

The predicted departure of Kiev's brightest talents to warmer, wealthier climes did not materialise during the winter break. Only Yuri Maximov left, for Bundesliga side Werder Bremen. So coach Lobanovsky can a field a familiar, well-organised unit against Juve, with the much-admired striking partnership of Rebrov and Shevchenko the star attractions.

Monaco vs Manchester United

Tigana: 'I want battlers'

Monaco's coach tells Keir Radnedge about the need to avoid complacency

HOW THEY LINE UP

MONACO

The French champions will be without two key players: midfielder Sylvain Legwinski (injured) and Ludovic Giuly, a £4.5million record signing (cup-tied after starring for Lyon in the UEFA Cup). Scottish international John Collins will play a pivotal role in midfield, while up front Trezeguet and Ikpeba know that Henry and N'doram are on the bench should they fail to deliver.

MANCHESTER UNITED

This season, Alex Ferguson's young side have left everyone trailing in their wake. Butt has proved an admirable replacement for injured captain Keane as the midfield anchor. Scholes has emerged from Cantona's shadow. Beckham and Giggs provide pace and penetration on the wings. And Norwegian Ole Solskjaer cannot get a game, such is the effectiveness of Cole and Sheringham's partnership.

Jean Tigana...difficult to please

MONACO are a team in the image of their top scorer, David Trezeguet. One moment, he appears unstoppable, vaulting tackles, wriggling through packed penalty boxes and scoring a hat-trick, as he did in the French League recently against Montpellier. The next moment, timing and talent are scattered to the four corner flags, as they were a few days later when he made his national team debut as a second-half substitute against Spain in the Stade de France inauguration and wasted two 'sitters'.

That is Monaco. One moment, they are irresistible, as they were in the UEFA Cup against Newcastle United both home and away last season; the next moment, falling over each other, as they were in a UEFA Cup defeat against Leeds United a few years back.

Coach Jean Tigana, an outstanding member of the magical French midfield of the mid-1980s when France won the European Championship and were Europe's great World Cup entertainers, frowns over the possibilities awaiting him, his club and their fans in the Champions League quarter-final against Manchester United.

To say that Tigana is still finding his best team is no overstatement. Monaco do not keep players long. The stars – and there have been plenty, from George Weah to Jurgen Klinsmann – love the money and the lifestyle but soon pine for the competitive intensity which Monte Carlo cannot provide.

Last summer, Tigana saw Brazilian striker Sonny Anderson fly south to Barcelona and midfield fulcrum Emmanuel Petit fly north to Arsenal. But that is the name of the game in Monaco and Tigana patiently set about rebuilding his squad for the French League and the Champions League.

Domestically, Monaco have been inconsistent. Going out of the French Cup on penalties to lower division Niort was a disappointment. But Manchester United might be better served paying heed to Monaco's excellent record in topping their Champions League first round group. They won four of their six games, drew one and lost one, scoring 15 goals – one more than United – and conceding eight.

When the chips were down, they rose to the challenge, never more so than in the last group match away to rampant Bayer Leverkusen. With an hour gone, Monaco were 2-0 down and seemingly out of the competition. Then goals from Pignol and Thierry Henry – Trezeguet's attacking partner and one of his best friends – shot the Monaco men level.

The draw lifted Monaco to the top of their group and suggested that Tigana might have been indulging in a spot of gamesmanship when he told WORLD SOCCER: "We have physical problems, we have team spirit problems – things haven't been going too well for us lately. We are not in good shape mentally or physically."

Trezeguet, Henry, newly crowned African Footballer of the Year Victor Ikpeba, Scotland's fit-again John Collins and Fabian Barthez – spurred on by the prospect of being the No 1 French goalkeeper at the World Cup – provide a nucleus of talent that opponents disregard at their peril.

In World Cup year, the French believe all things are possible – both at club and national team level. But Tigana knows very well the dangers of euphoria and complacency.

He says: "Things have not been going as well as they should. We are not being thorough enough in our performances. We are not making it difficult for our opponents to play. It's as if we think we are not physically strong enough to compete or we do not believe in our own abilities. For a coach, that is very frustrating."

He adds: "We have to forget we are a top team and commit ourselves as if we have just been promoted. After we lost to Niort in the Cup, my players were telling the media that they were feeling a little relieved because it would ease the fixture pressure on the team.

"I told them: 'I never want to hear my players have been talking or thinking that way.' We are professionals. If we do not take defeat hard then we are only part-time professionals."

The last time Monaco competed in the Champions League, they did so under false pretences. In 1993-94, Cup-holders Marseille had been barred from defending their crown because of the Valenciennes match-fixing scandal. Paris Saint-Germain were runners-up in the League to Marseille, but they were also entered in the Cup-winners Cup and there was a delicate matter of television interests to confuse matters.

Monaco were in the UEFA Cup, but it was deemed neater to promote them up to the Champions League in place of Marseille. In fact, they reached the semi-finals and the team boasted Klinsmann, Enzo Scifo, Youri Djorkaeff and Lilian Thuram. But Ikpeba, Trezeguet and co are worthy successors.

Also, as properly enthroned champions of France they have every right to dispute the Champions League this time around. As Tigana says: "We know United are good. But football is not an exact science."

Eric returns for United...

Eric Cantona, seen above playing in a beach soccer tournament, is set to return to Manchester United – in a one-off charity match to commemorate the 1958 Munich air disaster. Cantona, who is keen to thank the fans at Old Trafford after leaving so abruptly last summer, will captain a Rest of the World side in the first half, before swapping sides and playing for United in the second. Cantona left the club last May after helping them win four League titles.

Quick off the blocks...Jarni has speed as well as skill

Pace-setter

Nick Bidwell on Robert Jarni, Betis's quick-fire wide man who has Chelsea in his sights

Croat international wing-back or midfielder Robert Jarni will have featured on every page of Chelsea's scouting reports on Cup-winners Cup quarter-final opponents Real Betis. He knows he is likely to be a marked man when Andalucia meets the Kings Road.

As Chelsea should know only too well, width is at the heart of the Betis attacking philosophy, with multi-talented strikers Oli and Alfonso ever ready to gobble up the tasty morsels offered from the flanks by Jarni and Nigerian Finidi George. Shutting off those well-used Spanish supply lines will be a must for Ruud Gullit's Chelsea

Putting theory into practice, however, is another matter, especially considering the marvellous skills of the left-footed Jarni. Far tougher rearguards than Chelsea's have tried and failed to combat the Croat's speed over the ground – he can run 100 metres in 11 seconds – and precision centres.

"Robert is one of the best left-sided midfielders in the world today," argues Betis skipper Alexis. "He's a top-quality performer, but just as importantly, he's a great pro and team-mate as well. He works incredibly hard and never comes across as a prima donna.

"As a creative type, he's second to none. He can leave defenders for dead with his pace. Strikers dream of the sort of service Robert provides."

Not that Betis fans have only become accustomed to Jarni as an extraordinary left-wing provider. His shooting and free-kicks are a mean offensive weapon too, allying both power and accuracy. Chelsea fans sitting in Row Z behind the goal at Stamford Bridge shouldn't expect too many stray efforts to come their way.

Betis have become one of Spain's most competitive and entertaining teams, and Jarni has had no reason to rue his £3million transfer in 1995 from Italian trophy-machine Juve.

"Leaving wasn't a particularly hard decision to make," he says. "I was only there for a season and although they won the championship I did not have too much to do with it. I played only a handful of games for them and most of those were as substitute.

"I wanted regular football and after four years in Italy with Bari, Torino and Juventus, I fancied a new challenge in another country. Spain offered me everything I was looking for. The Liga has all the big clubs and star players you could wish for and my game has improved here. For many years, I was a traditional left-back, but I have moved into mid-field for Betis and I'm enjoying the freedom."

During his short spell at Juventus in the 94-95 season, Jarni started more European competition ties than Serie A matches, eventually picking up a UEFA Cup runners-up medal following Juve's Final defeat by Parma. If the Croat southpaw does help Betis beat Chelsea, who would bet against his going one better in the Cup-winners Cup?

Real Betis vs Chelsea

WITH BETIS STRUGGLING to make headway in the Spanish League – they are currently outside the UEFA Cup places – success in this season's Cup-winners Cup seems their best chance of guaranteeing European football in 98-99. Luis Aragones' side certainly have the talent to win the competition, particularly with the exciting Jarni and Finidi supplying the ammunition, and have made light work of their opponents so far – BVSC Budapest and FC Copenhagen.

The Andalucians are fortunate to be meeting favourites Chelsea at a time when the Londoners'ds form has been poor. Gianfranco Zola has been so indifferent that he was dropped from the Italian national squad for the recent friendly against Slovakia. Against Betis, Chelsea will be looking to the little Italian to reproduce the sort of display which saw them demolish Norwegians Tromso 7-1 at home in the last round.

● *Ties to be played on March 5 (return leg on March 19).*

Roda JC vs Vicenza

RODA MAY HAVE scored 20 goals in their four Cup-winners Cup games so far, but they were barely tested by Hapoel Beersheba (whom they hit for 10 in the first round second leg) or Primorje Ajdovscina of Slovenia. Against Vicenza, they may be found lacking. They have failed to find an adequate replacement for goalkeeper Ruud Hesp, sold to Barcelona before the season started, and this has been a major factor behind their lowly position in the Dutch League. The winter break sale to PSV of their best player, Andre Ooijer, has not helped.

A ray of hope for Roda lies in the fact that after last season's sterling form, Vicenza's Serie A performances this term have been mediocre. They lie in mid-table and have been having trouble finding the net. Uruguayan Marcelo Otero, a normally reliable goalscorer, has hardly featured. Even so, Vicenza's summer signing Pasquale Luiso has scored some vital goals in the earlier rounds of the Cup, when Francesco Guidolin's team beat Legia Warsaw and Shakhtar Donetsk.

Slavia Prague vs Stuttgart

SLAVIA, TRAILING ETERNAL rivals Sparta by some distance as the Czech League closed down for winter, will be looking to this competition to put some sparkle back into their season. Having come through on away goals after a tough second-round tie against Nice, the Prague side will be relying on the experience of keeper Jan Stejskal and the goalscoring prowess of Karel Vacha to give them a chance against Stuttgart.

Football resumed in Germany with Stuttgart third in the table and an enviable scoring record of 41 goals in 21 games. With Fredi Bobic, Jonathon Akpoborie and Krassimir Balakov riding high in the goalscoring charts, fading Romanian international Florin Raducioiu is finding it hard to get in the side. Other notable players in Stuttgart's strong team include Austrian international keeper Franz Wohlfahrt, defender Thomas Schneider, recently named in the German provisional World Cup squad, and the left-sided Macedonian international Mitko Stojkovski.

AEK Athens vs Lokomotiv Moscow

AEK, ALONG WITH Slavia Prague and Vicenza, are the three teams in the Cup-winners Cup quarter-finals in which the English National Investment Company (ENIC) has recently bought significant stakes. This raises the possibility that two of them might meet in the semi-finals and thus create a potential conflict of interests between sheer footballing ability and financial rewards.

AEK's jewel in the crown is 24-year-old Demis Nikolaidis, who is at his best when playing just behind the main strikers. He scored two in AEK's easy victory over Dinaburg Daugavpils in the first round, while Daniel Batista and Brazilian Marcelo fired home the goals in the second-round tie against Sturm Graz.

Lokomotiv, who include young Russian international midfielder Yevgeni Kharlachyev among their ranks, can expect a much tougher test from AEK than they have had so far from Belshyna Bobruisk of Belarus and Turkish side Kocaelispor.

Peter Neish

Pointing the way...Gareth Southgate leads Villa in the UEFA Cup

Southgate: Villa's pillar of strength

Gareth stands out amid team's troubles

WHEN ENGLAND boss Glenn Hoddle gets down to plotting his tactics against Romania in the World Cup finals, he need only turn to Gareth Southgate to get some useful advice. Already this season the Aston Villa captain has seen off Romanian opposition having returned from injury to help his side ease past Steaua Bucharest to earn a UEFA Cup quarter-final place against Atletico Madrid.

Villa's form in Europe has been in sharp contrast to their recent struggles in the League and Southgate knows that the challenges at home will have a crucial bearing on his summer plans. "Everyone knows there's a lot of work to be done between now and the summer. Your club form is what you'll be judged on for the World Cup, so I'm determined for us to climb as high as we can. I'm 27 now and I've had a reasonable career but I want to start winning things at domestic level. I'm sure we've got the potential to do it, but it's been disappointing the way things have gone so far this season."

Despite Villa's poor form, Southgate looks certain to figure in Hoddle's plans for France. He has started more England matches than any other player under Hoddle and has been part of a formidable England backline alongside Tony Adams and Sol Campbell.

But he's not the type to start converting his pounds into francs just yet. "There are probably five or six players guaranteed a place, the rest of us are battling to be in the final 22," he says. "Luckily, we're blessed with strength in depth in every position.

"Terry Venables started something which Glenn's now had the chance to take on a stage further. He's encouraged us to keep playing and we're now seeing an England team which is playing good football with players who are comfortable on the ball."

Southgate still seems a little surprised to be in the company of Shearer and Gascoigne – and to be playing in defence. When Brian Little signed him for Villa from Crystal Palace two summers ago, it was with the intention of playing him in midfield. "He signed me, then bought Mark Draper, and then he had a problem," Southgate laughs. "He knew I could play in defence, though, and I enjoy playing there now, that's where I'm strongest."

Barely had Southgate settled in at Villa than he was being handed an England call-up by Venables, and by the end of the season Southgate was a household name. Then came the World Cup showdown with Italy in October last year. "Being involved in Euro 96 was the highlight of my career. Then to go to Rome, against that quality of opposition, and get the right result, was terrific."

England's expectations are soaring, but Southgate is one player Hoddle can trust to keep his feet on the ground, to work hard to erase the bad memories of that penalty miss in Euro 96. Perhaps his luck is now making a change for the better.

Aidan Radnedge

Atletico Madrid vs Aston Villa

It's difficult to know which of these two teams enter the tie at lowest ebb. Atletico probably shade it, with coach Raddy Antic seeming to have finally tired of Jesus Gil and announcing his intention to leave this summer. Atletico have also suffered two serious injuries – though Kiko Narvaez should recover from ankle ligament damage in time to take on Villa, Juninho is out for at least five months with a broken leg. Extra responsibility will now fall on Christian Vieri and Jose Luis Caminero, whose goals saw off Croatia Zagreb in the last round. While Atletico can at least take some solace from the signing of Israeli midfielder Avi Nimni, Villa's League slump has now seen them slip close to the relegation zone. With Stan Collymore still underperforming and Savo Milosevic on the transfer list, Villa will be looking for goals from Dwight Yorke, who scored in the last round as Villa overcame Steaua.

● *Ties to be played on March 3 (return leg on March 17).*

Internazionale vs Schalke

If ever there was a good time to take on the Inter machine, it must be now. Seemingly invincible since the start of the Italian season, chinks are appearing in the side's armour after being dumped from the Italian Cup by Milan and seriously challenged by Juventus for the Serie A top spot. In Europe, too, there have been signs of weakness. Although Inter eventually defeated Strasbourg in the last round, the French club's 2-0 victory in the first leg will give Schalke confidence. For Inter, much will depend on how quickly new signing Paulo Sousa (from Dortmund) fits in, and particularly whether his intelligent play can revitalise Ronaldo. Schalke, the Cup holders, have so far made excellent progress this time round. With away wins at Hajduk Split and Anderlecht, they remain unbeaten, and easily disposed of Braga in the last round. Inter will need to be at their best to break down Thon and Linke's superbly marshalled backline – currently the meanest defence in the Bundesliga.

Lazio vs Auxerre

They may have fought off the likes of Juventus and Manchester United to secure the signature of Chile's Marcelo Salas, but how Lazio must be wishing that South America's Player of the Year was available to play before next season. With Signori off to Sampdoria, the onus will fall on Casiraghi to continue his goal feast in the competition. The hero of Italy's World Cup play-off against Russia has scored in every tie so far, including the last round's comfortable 3-0 aggregate win over Rapid Vienna. Auxerre's Stephane Guivarc'h has also found the net in every round, scoring five goals in total, and has been ably assisted by newly capped Bernard Diomede. The French club, who have recently offloaded Australian defender Ned Zelic to 1860 Munich and had Antoine Sibierski banned after failing a drugs test, have failed to make a serious assault on the League title this season and are eager for European success, particularly after last season's poor showing in the Champions League.

Ajax Amsterdam vs Moscow Spartak

Ajax may be romping home in the Dutch League, but their European campaign is not proving quite as easy. Having put 10 past Maribor in the first round, they only overcame Udinese on away goals, and were then two down in the home first leg against Bochum, before finally triumphing 6-4 on aggregate. Spartak's progress has been equally eventful, with their first round home leg against Sion needing to be replayed after one of the crossbars was found to be 12cm too low. In the last round, they needed an extra-time winner from Alexander Shirko to see off Karlsruhe. Although the Russians lack match practice, their confidence should be sky-high after winning their fifth domestic title in six years, and their cause can only be helped by the loss of Ajax defender Ole Tobiasen through injury. The Dutch, though, have a squad of depth and quality and coach Morten Olsen will be confident the side can continue their scoring form all the way to the Final.

Richard McClure

Boom or bust?

In the second of a two-part investigation into the rapidly changing world of soccer finance, Gavin Hamilton reports on the winners and loser in football's dash for cash

Last month, WORLD SOCCER reported how football clubs across Europe are preparing to raise substantial sums of money through stock market flotations. This unprecedented 'dash for cash' has been fuelled by the prospect of huge injections of revenue from pay TV, and been made necessary by the wage and transfer demands of players in the post-Bosman era.

We identified two clear developments. The first was the move by clubs, primarily in England but increasingly across Europe, to raise money through public share issues. The second was the activities of external institutional investors, most notably ENIC, the English National Investment Company, whose principle shareholder is Joe Lewis, a Bahamas-based tax exile and, reportedly, Britain's richest man.

ENIC currently owns, wholly or partly, football clubs in four different football clubs: Rangers (Scotland), AEK Athens (Greece), Slavia Prague (Czech Repubic) and Vicenza (Italy). Over the past month it has been linked with a further four: Rapid Vienna (Austria), Ferencvaros (Hungary), Boavista (Portugal) and Bordeaux (France).

All the above are successful in their own countries and so have the *potential* to succeed in European competition, where there are growing possibilities for lucrative TV and sponsorship deals.

Mark McCormack's IMG, with substantial interests in Asian soccer, is looking for European footballing investments to add to French club Strasbourg, which it purchased last year.

Financial pundits talk of 'the virtuous circle' when describing this merging of financial and football worlds. Investment in a club leads to the hiring of better players, which leads to better results, success and silverware, which leads to increased TV audiences and revenues, and hence more money to invest in better coaches and players. And so on.

The rush of clubs to float is by no means confined to Europe. From Argentina (where Boca Juniors have launched an investment fund with a difference – players' contracts are the assets) to Zambia (where Mulfulira Wanderers plan an entry on the Lusaka stock exchange), everybody wants to cash in on football's global success.

But Europe is where the real action is. Lazio shareholders have approved plans for a flotation on the Milan Bourse which would make the Italian club the first listed Serie A outfit.

Plans are not just confined to the big guns. In Holland, Ajax and PSV are considering flotations – but so are AZ Alkmaar and ADO Den Haag.

All are looking to emulate the success of English clubs. Manchester United, now one of the top 250 companies on the London stock exchange, raised £16m through a three per cent share expansion in late 1996. Newcastle United raised nearly £50m from their flotation.

But where will this leave football in five or 10 years time? Who stands to gain from football's switch from multi-million pound sport to multi-billion pound industry. And on the down side, who will lose out?

Keen to invest...Mark McCormack

Planned floatations

ENGLAND	**FRANCE**
Liverpool	Marsille, Paris SG
ITALY	**HUNGARY**
Lazio, Milan, Inter, Juve, Bologna, Vicenza	Ujpest TE
SPAIN	**BELGIUM**
Atletico, Deportivo, Betis	Anderlecht
PORTUGAL	**HOLLAND**
Benfica, Sporting, FC Porto	AZ Alkmaar, Ajax, ADO Den Haag, PSV Eindhoven
	GERMANY
	Bayern, Dortmund

Wage spiral...Atletico Madrid's Christian Vieri

The Winners

JEAN-MARC BOSMAN is cursed daily in football club boardrooms across Europe as club directors meet to thrash out new player contracts. Many agents, keen to get the best deal for their clients, are demanding outrageous deals, safe in the knowledge that clubs have little option but to accept or face losing their star men.

Robbie Fowler's 'representative' George Scott is believed to be behind stories that the Liverpool striker is demanding a new contract worth £50,000 a week. The implication for Liverpool, who are keen to tie Fowler to a 10-year deal, is that he will move on for free when his current contract expires.

Fowler is no doubt aware that his team-mate Steve McManaman has yet to put pen to paper on a similar contract, and has been linked with Barcelona. A transfer to Spain, either for a large fee this summer or for free in 1999, would make McManaman an instant multi-millionaire.

Tottenham's David Ginola was recently named by *L'Equipe* as the highest-earning French footballer, even though compatriots in Serie A earn more in wages. Ginola came out on top thanks to his lucrative sideline in advertising and product endorsements.

If there is any doubt that players are some of the biggest winners from football's dash for cash, consider the case of Christian Vieri. Less than two years ago the Italian striker was earning £3,000 a week at Atalanta. A move to Juventus in the summer of 1997 took his weekly wage to £5,000. However, some impressive performances in the Champions League and an Italy debut raised his transfer value dramatically.

With Juventus looking to balance the books in order to statisfy the conditions needed for a stock exchange flotation, Atletico Madrid's £12m offer for Vieri last summer was too good to refuse for the Italian champions. The player signed a lucrative deal with Atletico, with a salary reported to be more than £21,000 a week. Nice work...

Club directors have also benefitted. David Murray has a stake reportedly worth £150m in Scottish champions Rangers. He initially invested £5m. Manchester United chairman Martin Edwards's holding in the club is worth more than £50m. Ten years ago, he nearly sold out to Michael Knighton for £10m – a deal which would have netted him a profit of £1m.

Arsenal vice-chairman David Dein, who bought a 14 per cent stake in the North London club for £330,000 15 years ago, has seen the value of his shareholding rise to more than £50m.

Even the directors of ENIC have started to see a return for their money. Managing director Daniel Levy is believed to have benefitted from a substantial option scheme when ENIC raised £51m by selling shares to eight financial institutions. Plans are well advanced to float ENIC on the stock exchange in the near future.

Much of the driving force behind football's boom in England has come from Rupert Murdoch's Sky television. Last year BSkyB announced profits of £314m, figures which would have been highly unlikely had it not acquired the rights to the Premier League.

The new challenge for Sky and its pay-TV counterparts on the Continent is to maximise their income from the advent of digital revolution. Sky has ordered the production of one million 'set-top' decoder boxes as it bids to keep control of the UK pay-TV market.

The biggest winners, however, are likely to be those clubs who can use their 'brand name' to sell themselves around the world – the Manchester Uniteds, Milans and Bayern Munichs.

For these 'Blue Ribbon' clubs with marketable brands, things can only get bigger and better. They look set to benefit in a number of ways.

They will snuffle up the largest slice of their respective domestic pay-TV markets. Under pay-per-view, the more fans you have, the bigger the profit.

These clubs can tap into growing sources of income from European competitions. Those people who talk about a European 'superleague' in the future tense have missed the point: it is already with us. The currrent format of the UEFA Champions League offers us a glimpse of the income that will be available from sponsorship and prize money, not to mention TV income, when domestic leagues are reduced to 16 teams to allow for mid-week Champions League matches to be extended through the spring.

Then there is money from merchandising. There was method in the apparent madness of Manchester United's pre-season tour of the Far East last summer. Asia is a vast market, ripe for exploitation by the United 'brand'. If Martin Edwards ever has trouble sleeping, he can always try counting the number of David Beckham duvet covers United plan to shift in Shanghai.

Newcastle United have taken note. They are reported to have sought advice from IMG, who helped to launch the professional league in China recently, on how to sell themselves in the Far East.

The recent rumoured link-up between Juventus and Crystal Palace had as much to with Juve's interest in Ron Noades's marketing skills as Palace's desire to sign thirtysomething ex-internationals.

'For Blue Ribbon clubs with marketable brands, things can only get bigger and better'

In a recent report for accountants KPMG, James Dow and Steve Lloyd noted: "Clubs need to see themselves as media businesses...many have failed to acknowledge that football is essentially a media business. There is inadequate representation of the media on boards at football clubs throughout Europe."

That is starting to change, with IMG's ownership of Strasbourg and the purchase of Swiss club Servette by Canal Plus, owers of Paris Saint-Germain. Vigorous marketing and merchandising initiatives are also expected to take place across the Continent, and beyond.

Dow and Lloyd concluded: "English clubs have led the way in commercial development and, in the short term, will continue to do so – but the superbrands in Europe have awoken to the challenge and are pursuing the opportunities rigorously. In future they will be competing in the capital markets as well as on the field."

Players' wages – highs & lows

Belgium
Top earner: Par Zetterberg (Anderlecht) – £550,000 p.a.
Lowest: First team pro at Westerlo – £21,000
France
Top earner: Marco Simone (PSG) – £1.9m
Lowest: First team pro at Chateauroux – £15,000
Germany
Top earner: Matthias Sammer (Dortmund) – £2m
Lowest: First year pro at Wolfsburg £25,000
Holland
Top earner: Ronald de Boer (Ajax) – £850,200
Lowest: First team pro at NEC – £20,000
Italy
Top earners: Ronaldo (Internazionale) – £3.5m
Gabriel Batistuta (Fiorentina) – £2.1m
Lowest: Massilmilano Caniato (Udinese) £13,000

The Losers

"IT WILL SELL because it's really not about money – it's about passion." That was the reaction of one Argentinian banker when asked to assess the potential of an investment fund launched recently in Buenos Aires by Boca Juniors.

In other words: it doesn't matter whether it's a good or bad investment, the fans will buy into it regardless.

Whatever happens in football over the next decade, one thing is certain – supporters will be paying more for it.

If pay-per-view TV takes off, fans will pay for players' rising wage demands with standing orders to the likes of Canal Plus and Telepiu. If pay-per-view fails to capture people's imagination, fans will bail clubs out through increased ticket prices and ever more merchandise.

In the dash for cash, big is beautiful and profit is plentiful – for those who can afford it. For those smaller clubs (not just in the lower leagues) who cannot afford rising transfer fees and wages, things will surely get worse.

Last year, Deloitte and Touche reported that the English Football League has to fund losses of £48m, but received transfer income from the Premier League of £13m.

Big clubs could lose out too – if they fail to adapt to changing times. Bayern Munich are keen on a share issue to pay for a new stadium where they can take all the gate money. In Italy, though, many stadiums are still municipally-owned. In France, clubs are still partly-owned by local councils.

In Spain Barcelona, whose potential for marketing and merchandising is admittedly enormous, have no plans to float. But having the Pope as your 100,000th *socio* will not pay for the Ronaldos and Rivaldos of the future.

Bold prediction...Silvio Berlusconi

What the future holds

Three imaginary scenarios to consider

The good...

UEFA imposes a wage cap on the earnings of players in Europe's top leagues and offers extra Champions League places to those domestic leagues who agree to redistribute 10 per cent of income from pay-per-view TV deals to lower division clubs.

The 2008 European Champions League Play-off Final is won by an exciting young Ajax side. The Final is watched by a worldwide television audience of 500 million, and generates £50million in pay-TV revenue. Forty-five thousand Ajax and Barcelona fans are admitted to the stadium free of charge, as once predicted by Silvio Berlusconi.

The bad...

A player wage cap, introduced by UEFA in 1999, is abandoned after just four months following a European Court ruling that the cap is illegal under European law.

Shares in Sky tumble after the company releases figures which reveal the low take-up rate of pay-per-view TV in England. Sky admits it failed to heed advice in a 1997 report by Oliver and Ohlbaum which warned that PPV might only be worth £450m a season by 2003/4.

The 2008 European Superbowl is won by IMG-owned Bayern Munich amid allegations that Lazio, also owned by IMG, agreed in advance to 'throw' the game to boost Bayern's flagging share price.

...and the ugly

Football's transfer system is abolished by a European Court ruling. Sky, increasingly disillusioned by the failure of pay-per-view, invests heavily in basketball. The TV rights to the 2007/8 Premier League season are bought by the BBC for £50m.

UEFA accepts Don King's offer offer of a world league in a bid to satisfy disappointed sponsors. The 2008 World Superbowl is won by a European All Stars team coached by film director Eric Cantona. They beat Diego Maradona's American All Stars thanks a goal in the third quarter from Ronaldo, attempting his third comeback from a serious knee injury sustained at the 1998 World Cup.

ITALY

The fat's in the fire

Paddy Agnew examines the problems facing Ronaldo, Baggio, Inter and the national side

Grand schemer...Inter's new purchase, Paulo Sousa

AS WE HEAD into the second half of the Italian season, the fat is in the fire and spitting viciously.

Reigning champions Juventus have knocked Inter off the top of the table, Brazilian ace Ronaldo has come in for his first bout of Italian media criticism, Roberto Baggio is no longer sure of his place at Bologna, and national coach Cesare Maldini has been experimenting with a view to France 98.

After a New Year which began in the best possible way, with a 1-0 home win against champions Juventus, pretenders Inter could hardly have expected to find themselves toppled from the top of Serie A by the end of the month.

Yet that is how it went following two unimpressive performances, a 1-0 home loss to Bari and a 1-1 away draw with Empoli. The club also experienced the humiliation of a 5-1 Italian Cup thrashing and elimination by city rivals, Milan.

On the morning after Juventus went to the front – thus becoming 'winter champions' at the halfway mark in the 34-match Serie A season – there was much recrimination in the air. Somewhat unfairly, fingers were pointed at no less than Ronaldo, the club's £22million Brazilian phenomenon.

One of the most authoritative pointers was Inter's owner, petrol millionaire Massimo Moratti, who was far from tender with his boy wonder.

"Do I think Ronaldo is in crisis?" he asked. "It definitely seems so to me and perhaps it would be a good idea if he understood this and got it into his head.

"Is it a physical problem? That I don't know, but what I can say is that he's playing badly and that's for sure."

Veteran radio commentator Sandro Ciotti described Ronaldo as "a classic enigma", and added: "If he scores, he justifies his presence. If he fails to score, then you are playing with 10 men because he makes no contribution to the overall team work, he never covers back, he doesn't help team-mates much, but just waits for the good pass to come his way."

Gazzetta Dello Sport questioned both Inter's long-term planning and short-term tactics, suggesting the club puts too much responsibility on young shoulders: "Can you really base a whole winning season on a 21-year-old, even if he is a phenomenon? That is the difficult question that Inter must ask."

Many commentators also took mischievous delight in pointing out that the combined annual incomes of the entire Empoli team who drew with Inter amounted to £6million, or £800,000 less than Ronaldo's pre-tax annual salary.

Significantly, Ronaldo's coach, Gigi Simoni, and team-mates such as Uruguayan Alvaro Recoba (a player who only gets on as a substitute when things are going wrong) all stood by the Brazilian, with the coach admitting that Ronaldo was not the only player off form and Recoba pointing out that Ronaldo is only human and can make mistakes.

Ronaldo, for his part, admitted that there were problems, adding ominously, however, that in Spain people showed him more respect.

Significantly, Inter's response was to reach into their seemingly bottomless pockets one more time and buy yet another big name, Portugal and Borussia Dortmund midfield schemer, Paulo Sousa, for a reported £5million fee.

The reasoning behind this final purchase of the season was all too obvious – to find someone capable of stitching together the midfield and, above all, of being able to lay on the through ball for Ronaldo.

Simoni put it this way: "With Sousa in the side, the quality of our game can improve a lot...because he's the sort of player who speeds up your attacking, the sort of player who can hit the first-time through ball without stopping to think."

While Inter and Ronaldo licked their wounds, Juventus blazed their way through January, seeming galvanised by that 1-0 defeat by Inter. As reported here last month, Juventus coach Marcello Lippi said at the time that the overall level of the Juventus performance boded well for the immediate future.

And so it has proved, with the team recording consecutive wins against Vicenza, Bologna, Atalanta and Lecce in the League, and Fiorentina in the Cup.

The Juventus championship challenge, however, suffered a severe blow in that win against Lecce, when experienced international defender Ciro Ferrara broke his left leg in an accidental clash with Lecce midfielder Alessandro Conticchio.

As both players went for a 50-50 ball on the edge of the Juventus penalty area, they slid into each other on the wet, slippery pitch.

Ferrara, almost certain to be out for the rest of the season, World Cup included, will be badly missed both by Juventus and Italy. He is supremely versatile and a player who won two Italian titles alongside Diego Maradona at Napoli. He has been capped 44 times and was a key element in the plans of both Lippi and Cesare Maldini.

His experience and his ability to alternate between playing central defender, man-to-man marker, sweeper or full-back made him invaluable for both Juventus and Italy.

Ferrara's last game for Italy had been played just four days earlier. The 3-0 friendly victory over Slovakia proved remarkably unenlightening about possible changes for France 98. Within minutes of Italy's last-gasp play-off qualification for France at the expense of Russia last November, Maldini had said that he would experiment at the first available opportunity.

Fading hopes...Roberto Baggio

True to his word, he introduced three intriguing new midfielders in Luigi Di Biagio (Roma), Francesco Moriero (Inter) and Sandro Cois (Fiorentina), all uncapped. Fortunately for the newcomers, Maldini had also selected middle-ranking opponents who were in mid-winter break and thus not fully fit.

Italy enjoyed themselves thoroughly with all three new boys doing very nicely, thank you. Di Biagio was most impressive of the three and with this one performance seems to have already booked a place in the 22 for France. As for Cois and Moriero, the door definitely remains open.

Outside midfield, there was little or nothing to be learned from the Slovakia game. In defence, Maldini recalled Moreno Torricelli (Juventus) – prophetic in view of the subsequent injury to Ferrara – to play alongside established figures such as Alessandro Costacurta, Alessandro Nesta, Paolo Maldini and Fabio Cannavaro. These are the men for France, with the addition perhaps of Salvatore Fresi (Inter) or Stefano Torrisi (Bologna) as cover for Costacurta.

Up front, Zola, Del Piero, Ravanelli, Vieri and Casiraghi are all certain inclusions in the squad, but it seems that there is little or no hope for Roberto Baggio. The one-time Little Prince of Italian soccer touched a new low in his recent decline when Bologna coach Renzo Ulivieri dropped him, against his old club, Juventus, in mid-January.

It seemed like a final humiliation for Baggio. To be unable to command an automatic first-team place at a side such as Bologna, battling against relegation, seemed too unreal to be true. In a fit of pique, Baggio walked out of the team camp, refusing to sit on the bench during the Juventus game. In scenes of high drama, however, he and Ulivieri settled their differences the next week, leaving the club grounds together in Ulivieri's car in a much filmed 'exit, stage left'.

For the one time World and European Player of the Year, however, the chances of making the squad for France 98 are slim. Baggio may now be regretting his decision last summer to settle for Bologna rather than move abroad and accept offers from clubs in England, Spain, Japan and the USA. That is one mistake the 31-year-old may not repeat this summer when he is sure to be once more looking for new employment.

Club Focus Udinese

Paddy Agnew on the not-so-surprising Serie A upstarts

On target...Udinese are set fair for another UEFA Cup qualification

JOURNALISTIC cliché would have it that Udinese are the 'surprise packets' of the Serie A season so far. After all the club from the prosperous north-eastern town of Udine are not normally considered one of Italian soccer's traditional powerhouses. Until this season, Udinese had never played in European competition while at home the club has yet to win either the Serie A title or the Italian Cup. Indeed, for most of the past 20 years, Udinese's one and only realistic seasonal objective was to guarantee First Division survival.

But while that recent history would suggest that it is surprising to find Udinese in the top three of Serie A this season, their good run so far is only a relative upturn for the books. After all, we have only just passed the halfway point of a season in which some of the traditional big guns – Juventus, Lazio, Fiorentina, Sampdoria – are only now beginning to fire on all cylinders. Remember, too, the example of little Vicenza last season. For a period in late 1996, they actually led Serie A. Right now, they are closer to the relegation zone than the top.

There is another obvious reason why Udinese cannot be considered a surprise and that is linked to their fine showing last season when they played their way into European competition for the first time in club history, finishing fifth in Serie A and thus claiming a UEFA Cup place. (Their UEFA Cup run lasted only two rounds, eliminated on away goals by Ajax Amsterdam).

Inevitably, many elements play a part in the success story. Coach Alberto Zacheroni has been extremely shrewd in getting the best out of a motley band of journeymen players, some of whom, such as strikers Paolo Poggi and Brazilian Amoroso as well as Belgian midfielder Johan Walem, Danish defender Thomas Helveg and Milan reject Thomas Locatelli, are all above average Serie A players.

Perhaps most significant of all in the recent rise and rise of Udinese, however, has been the contribution of German striker Oliver Bierhoff. When Bierhoff was plying his trade with Second Division Ascoli and at a time when he was widely considered not good enough for Serie A, Udinese and Zacheroni chose to believe in him, signing him in the summer of 1995. The club's reward came via 30 Serie A goals in Bierhoff's first two seasons and the German is currently joint leading goalscorer this season with 14.

But despite Bierhoff's impact at the club, he is quick to credit the team as a whole, and above all Zacheroni, for Udinese's current form. "We form a great group. We know everything by heart and once the game has started, even those on the bench know what to do if they are called on," he says. "For this we must thank the coach, who has established our style of play. Thanks to him, I can progress."

Looking to the immediate future, Udinese's prospects seem bound up with Bierhoff's plans. If the German again chooses to reject offers from clubs such as Inter and Manchester United, then Udinese are likely to maintain their recent high standards. If Bierhoff leaves, Udinese's footballing future may be compromised. However, it was nice while it lasted, no?

GOALKEEPERS

Luigi Turci	Aged 28
Massimiliano Caniato	30

DEFENDERS

Valerio Bertotto	25
Alessandro Calori	31
Mohammed Gargo	22
Regis Genaux	24
Thomas Helveg	26
Alessandro Pierini	24

MIDFIELDERS

Jonathan Bachini	22
Massimiliano Cappioli	30
Giuliano Giannichedda	23
Martin Jorgensen	22
Francesco Statuto	26
Johan Walem	26

FORWARDS

Marcio Amoroso	23
Oliver Bierhoff	29
Thomas Locatelli	21
Paolo Poggi	26

MEN TO WATCH

Oliver BIERHOFF
Not since the days of Zico in the mid-80s have Udinese had a scorer so high in the Serie A rankings at the halfway stage. Recently beat Rudi Voller's goalscoring record for a German in the Italian top flight.

Thomas HELVEG
Born in Odense, the Danish international wing-back started out with his home town club OB before joining Udinese in November 1993. Has played more than 30 games in each of the three full seasons since. Should be a key man for Denmark at France 98.

Thomas LOCATELLI
Young striker born in Bergamo who cut his teeth at Atalanta before moving to Milan. Played just 10 League games in two seasons there but is now a regular at Udinese, who he joined in January last year.

Top of the charts...Oliver Bierhoff

SPAIN

Favourites slip in Winte

Graham Turner sees Barcelona and Real Madrid struggle to climb any mountain

Corking winner...Valencia's Ariel Ortega (left) took the fizz out of Barcelona

THERE'S an old Spanish footballing axiom which describes the month of January as 'a steep uphill slope'. Louis Van Gaal certainly needed crampons, ice-picks and mountaineering boots to stay upright and, according to malicious tongues – some of them within the dressing-room – Sherpa Tensing might have done a better job in the Barcelona dugout.

During one of the most bizarre months in the club's history, the side's style of mountaineering left the fans totally perplexed. Barça 98 started the year by climbing every mountain in sight in highly professional style but, just as they were about to plant the Catalan flag on the summit, they lost their footing and their heads and plummeted back to base camp looking dazed and even more bewildered than their fans.

They went to Salamanca, took a 3-1 lead and, with just 11 minutes to go, did a communal whoops, allowing the side who had scored just seven goals at home all season to hammer three in seven minutes. The 4-3 victory was improbable enough to have Salamanca's normally sombre coach, Chechu Rojo, dancing on the touchline and bear-hugging anybody within reach.

Van Gaal then roped his team together for an assault on the north face. Real Sociedad were unbeaten in San Sebastian but Barça simply trod all over them. Goals by Luis Enrique and Sonny Anderson put them two up with eight minutes to go but the rope broke and goals by Loren (82) and De Paula (89) snatched a draw. The press started talking about The Salamanca Syndrome. Van Gaal joked: "We're improving. At least we managed to salvage a point."

The next mountain to climb was a home fixture against struggling Valencia. I should have left the barman at my tennis club to write about this one. To win the Spanish pools, you have to predict 1, X or 2 in a list of 14 games. By Sunday night he had 13 correct. All he needed was a 1 or an X in the Monday game at Nou Camp.

Luis Enrique and Rivaldo put Barça 2-0 up and when Fernando Caceres gave them a third by turning a cross into his own net, the barman headed off to the cellar to find a vintage cava. By the time he came back, Guillermo Morigi (69) and Claudio Lopez (74) had made it 3-2.

Lopez equalised with two minutes to go and 'Burrito' Ortega's last-minute winner produced the poignant sight of a barman trying to shove the cork back into a champagne bottle. The press started screaming about The Salamanca Syndrome.

Six days later, Van Gaal's intrepid climbers decided that the best way to avoid falls from the upper slopes was to stay at base camp. Deportivo scored three (Fran, Abreu and a sensational Djalminha) and, with Barça still tucked up in their thermal sleeping bags, Donato gave them an own goal to make it a charitable 3-1. The defeat was so conclusive that nobody mentioned The Salamanca Syndrome. Total: Barcelona finished January with one point out of 12. Only Sporting Gijon, with zero, were worse.

The problem with such a bad run, of course, is that it generates tremendous pressures within the dressing-room. Brazilian striker Sonny Anderson was the first to express his malaise. "I'm not playing unless I can play centre-forward," he told local reporters, adding – unwittingly providing a significant comment on attitudes within the modern game – that playing 'in the hole' involved too much running.

A local opinion poll then revealed that 81.75 per cent of the fans consulted reckoned that the playing system was to blame for the tumbles on the uphill slope and 73.25 per cent felt that Van Gaal was logically the only guy to blame.

Up stepped Hristo Stoichkov, thoroughly Hrist off at being left out week out, week out. "The fans can't be wrong," he said. "And I agree with them." You may find this hard to believe, but neither Sonny nor Hristo was in the squad for the next match.

Van Gaal needed no telling that his system was not working. Conceding 13 goals in four games was way beyond Barcelona's traditional parameters, just as the 14 conceded in six Champions League matches had confounded the international critics. Man-to-man marking can be effective against ambitious opponents who field two or more front men, but has looked highly vulnerable against more conservative rivals who base their counter-attacks on throwing men forward from midfield. Another statistical study revealed that Barcelona had created 107 scoring chances in the League. Their opponents had created 128.

Leaking defence...Barça's Bogarde and Hess

All this explains why the home fixture against Sporting, who had set an all-time record by taking only three points from 22 games, suddenly became Mount Everest coated with banana skins.

Barcelona began timidly, testing the rope, watching every step and, seemingly, stopping to look down every now and then and getting scared out of their wits. Rivaldo headed them in front, but a Cherishev equaliser provoked hysteria on the terraces. Luckily a long-ranger from Rivaldo was deflected into the Gijon net a minute later, giving rise to the somewhat unusual spectacle of Barcelona defending their narrow advantage for the entire second half. When the final whistle sounded, the fans brought out their white handkerchiefs in the sempiternal sign of protest. Suspiciously, some of them had brought two, having come with a predisposed snotty attitude.

By the way, the Blue Elephant group – the organisation set up to oppose club president Josep Lluis Nunez – has now presented 6,000 signatures of *socios* prepared to endorse a motion of censure against the Nunez administration. Watch this space...

Not all was gloom and doom. At least Barcelona had run up a 2-0 home advantage over a very amiable Borussia Dortmund in the first leg of the European Supercup – return on March 11 – and had scraped past Valencia in the Copa del Rey to earn a quarter-final draw against Merida. Barça had beaten Valencia 2-1 at home, but travelled to the Luis Casanova just three days after the epic 4-3 defeat in the League. A Rivaldo penalty put them ahead, but Valencia's equaliser by Jocelyn Angloma produced an attack of The Salamanca Syndrome until Rivaldo, in two isolated breaks, scored one more and set up a third for Giovanni.

The other consolation in Barcelona was that Real Madrid had also been attending the Whoops-a-Daisy Rock-Climbing School. The net result of their January was four points and a humiliating Copa del Rey elimination by Second Division team Alaves,

inter Games

who had the nerve to spoil Christian Karembeu's debut by winning 1-0 in Vitoria and then managing to lose only 2-1 in Madrid. Real were comprehensively unamused and the media began to wonder how much longer Jupp Heynckes would hang on to the rope.

As in Barcelona, the run of bad results produced cracks in the dressing-room, with the press making much ado about Christian Panucci's passionate berating of his team-mates during the bleak 1-0 win over Salamanca. However, parallels between Madrid and Barcelona are not quite so easy to draw. The summit which Heynckes and his merry men wish to reach is European glory in the Amsterdam Arena on May 20. January was therefore pencilled into the season's calendar as a 'low-key' period, with a target of getting the squad back to peak condition for the double confrontation with Bayer Leverkusen in March. It was also a month for trying to establish a new balance in midfield, where Karembeu and Savio were being grafted in.

The slipping and sliding by the Big Two at least allowed the outsiders to make up considerable leeway. Atletico Madrid's rollercoaster season has been helped by the longish-term injuries to their star ball-players, Kiko and Juninho, while Christian Vieri has raised Raddy Antic's hackles by declaring himself unfit when the doc says he's OK. Juninho's KO was controversial. His ankle was broken by a vicious tackle from behind by Michel Salgado during the 1-1 draw with Celta in Vigo. Salgado freely admitted it had been a red card offence against a player who was bearing down on the goalkeeper, but he got away scot-free. Not even a foul, said the ref.

Athletic Bilbao and Betis (two games in hand) have also taken up the slack. But the team who converted January into a downhill race was Bernd Krauss's Real Sociedad. The German coach rounded off the month by putting one over his former Borussia Monchengladbach maestro, Heynckes. After going a goal behind and seeing Alberto save a blockbuster penalty from Roberto Carlos, the Basques showed character, team spirit and tactical compactness in sprinting to a 4-2 win.

Krauss then took his lads to Nueva Zorilla, where Real Sociedad hadn't won for nine years, to take on Sergio Kresic's Valladolid, winners of their previous four home games. The 4-0 demolition job consolidated Real in third place, within a stone's throw of the Big Two. The Basques are now seriously wondering whether their first League title since 1982 is a dream or reality.

Alberto has been one of the key figures in the side, with only Espanyol's Toni having conceded fewer goals. He is usually protected by a back four comprising Fuentes, Loren, Pikabea and Lopez Rekarte, who has shown such good form at left-back that international Aranzabal has been pushed forward into midfield to make way for him. Krauss has enough strength in depth to allow himself various tactical permutations, with Imaz, Gomez, Kuhbauer and Gracia the main contenders for the other midfield positions, while new signing Cvitanovic vies with Craoiveanu, Kovacevic and the impressive De Paula for the more offensive roles.

The Big Two have not been the only ones to suffer nasty surprises. The courts have deemed that the recent share issue by former Valencia president, Francisco Roig, is null and void, which means that he no longer has a majority holding. But on the playing side, Valencia's Italian coach Claudio Ranieri has knocked some sort of shape back into the team and has settled his differences with Argentine Ariel 'Little Donkey' Ortega. Ranieri had previously sidelined the club's most expensive, signing claiming he trained less than anybody else and that the little donkey needed a kick up the ass.

Despite their wretched campaign, Valencia finished January with only one point fewer than at the same time last year. Significantly, Real Madrid and Barcelona were, respectively, nine and six points down on last season.

Javier Clemente delivered Van Gaal a bit of a backhander by fielding six Barcelona players in the inaugural game at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, among them Nadal, Amor and Pizzi who can't make the first team at the Nou Camp. The 1-0 defeat (Clemente was handicapped by injuries to Kiko, Guardiola, Hierro and Guerrero) put an end to a 31-match unbeaten run – barring penalty shootout defeats – since Spain lost 2-1 to Italy in the 1994 World Cup. The match also marked the international debut of Fernando, the Real Madrid reject who had a superb 1996-97 season with Valladolid and is now starring for Betis.

Another statistic which inspires reflection is that none of the 15 players used by Aime Jacquet at the Stade de France is playing in Spain. A curious statement, you might think. Yet French footballers have been the flavour of month after month in the Spanish League. However, of the 18 Frenchmen signed in the past two seasons, nine have been offloaded and three others can't hold down a first-team place. Hmmm…

The fact didn't pass unnoticed at the headquarters of AFE, Spain's Footballers' Union. They are still making determined attempts to persuade clubs that foreign is not always better or cheaper. Of the 111 new foreigners signed this season, they point out, only 54 per cent have been of proven international standard. They also question whether the £215million in transfer fees has been money well spent.

Especially as some of the most expensive can't seem to negotiate uphill slopes…

Pro-file Luis Fernandez

Bilbao's theatrical coach takes centre-stage

Club Athletic Bilbao
Country France
Born October 2, 1959, in Tarifa, Spain
Previous clubs as coach Cannes (Fra), Paris St Germain (Fra)
International record as player 68 caps for France
Honours European Championship 1984

AS A PLAYER, Luis Fernandez played Cyrano de Bergerac to Platini, Giresse and Tigana; he was the gawky, unsung hero who grafted in the wings as the more heralded trio waxed lyrical in France's best-ever midfield. As a coach, Fernandez remains an all-action, sleeves-up character, but this time around he is receiving the plaudits he deserves.

A typical 90 minutes at Athletic Bilbao's San Mames stadium will see almost as many photographers next to the home side's dugout as following the game. Fernandez is a visual soundbite – theatrically stalking his touchline domain through rain and shine, at turns celebrating and raging, he is an idol at a club that demands its heroes live their football with extra special intensity. "I've always lived my life at 1,000kph," he says. "I guess it's too late to change now."

Fernandez was born in Tarifa, Cadiz, in 1959 but left his native country at the age of six. Like so many of the poor from Spain's deep south, his widowed mother moved her family north in search of a better life.

Young Luis was brought up in Lyon but made his name as a player in Paris, first at PSG and then at Racing Club. While at PSG he made his national team debut, in 1982. "I would have loved to play for Spain," Fernandez recalls, "but in those days clubs could only field two foreigners, so PSG suggested I take French nationality."

After a brief apprenticeship at Cannes, Fernandez returned to Paris to establish his credentials as a top-line coach. After two seasons flirting with European glory, he led PSG to the European Cup-winners Cup in 1996, all the while preaching the gospel of Johan Cruyff. "Football is not about winning, it's about how you win," insists Fernandez. "You can't bore thousands of fans just in the name of winning. It's about entertainment and Cruyff's Barça set the standards." Ironically, before Fernandez joined Bilbao, he was approached by Barcelona to replace his idol.

In his first season, 1996-97, Fernandez led Athletic to sixth place and back into Europe. And stirring victories against Real Madrid and Barcelona at San Mames went some way to restoring Basque pride after a decade of mediocrity.

With a never-say-die character like Fernandez at the helm, the prodigious attacking quartet of Guerrero, Etxeberria, Urzaiz and Alkiza promise more glory nights in the club's centenary season. And then there's the boss's now legendary press conferences. If he ever gets tired of coaching, Luis definitely has a future in slapstick. When Atletico Madrid's Radomir Antic played hard done by after his side's recent defeat, Fernandez responded by bombarding journalists with Kleenex as he impersonated a yelping dog! More recently, he received a one-match suspension after blowing kisses at a referee.

Fernandez may be slightly cuckoo, but he's also a realist, and while Athletic maintain their present recruitment policy, the championship remains a pipe-dream. "I'm right behind Athletic's philosophy," he says. "As long as the people here won't consider the issue of non-Basque players, neither will I. I feel at home at this club, and anybody who's seen my kids parading around Bilbao in their Athletic shirts will tell you how integrated my family are, too."

Admirable sentiments, but with a steady stream of offers from bigger clubs in Spain and beyond, and rumours of the France job after the World Cup, how long will it be before Fernandez succumbs to reality and his kids need a different replica kit?

Jeff King

Diomede joins Jacquet's hopefuls

Despite victory over Spain, Andre Duclos wonders if France's front men have what it takes

New boy...Diomede gives Jacquet another attacking option in the run-up to the finals

BERNARD DIOMEDE of Auxerre made his national team debut on the left attacking flank for France against Spain at the opening of the new Stade de France in Saint-Denis, a game watched by 80,000 fans despite the bitter cold of winter.

Diomede, 24, has a powerful left foot but looked slightly out of his depth and more than a little nervous on this first occasion representing his country.

Now, with the World Cup finals approaching, Aime Jacquet, who will bow out afterwards whatever happens, must decide whether to give Diomede another chance, in the hope that his temperament will take the strain, or else turn to his more experienced alternatives.

The 1-0 win over Spain, achieved on an icy and almost unplayable pitch, was encouraging – even if the goal, knocked in by Zinedine Zidane, came from a mistake by Spain's eternal goalkeeper, Zubizarreta.

There were signs though that Zidane and Youri Djorkaeff, both of whom have had patchy seasons for their Italian clubs, were getting back into the old routine, re-establishing the partnership which was looking so productive until Euro 96.

Zidane, who came to the game off the back of a two-goal performance for Juventus three days earlier, has said all along that the World Cup is his chief priority, something which hasn't exactly endeared him to the Juventus bosses and supporters. Now, after much inconsistency, he is finally hitting peak form again.

Djorkaeff's sudden slump at Inter has been hard to explain, though it may have something to do with the correspondingly poor form of Brazilian star Ronaldo.

The French championship is anybody's guess. It really did look as if Metz – despite their small squad – were going to walk off with it, but a sudden slip at home to Bastia, who had beaten vulnerable Paris Saint-Germain a few days before, has opened up the contest once again.

Marseille, who now seem sure to keep Fabrizio Ravanelli at least until May, are making a strong bid, as are Monaco – whose David Trezeguet came on as a substitute against Spain and missed at least one very good chance. Trezeguet's three goals against Montpellier may not have been the most elegant of hat-tricks, but at least the strikes helped banish some recent poor form.

PSG are a mystery. Losing Guerin on the doping charge has been a blow, but surely not enough to explain such results as their home defeat to Le Havre.

At the other end of the table, Strasbourg, who fell on hard times after their elimination of Liverpool in the UEFA Cup and their initial success against Inter, have been rebuilding to some effect.

After long absence, that gifted French international of Portuguese origin, Corentin Martins, has returned to give skill and shape to the midfield, while a most interesting and promising acquisition has been the South Korean attacker, Seo Jung-won.

He has been capped 75 times, scoring 25 goals, and can run 100 metres in 10.7 seconds. So far, he has found it a little hard to fit in with his new colleagues for all his endless, determined running. He showed in each of his first two games, however, that he can score goals, poaching the second in a 4-4 draw at Bordeaux.

Seo Jung-won will, of course, be seen in the World Cup finals – but quite which strikers will take their place in the host nation's line-up remains a mystery.

Whether Trezeguet is ready to lead the line, despite all those goals in the League, must be a moot point. Of the others, Florian Maurice of PSG, has yet to score for France or otherwise show his ability at the very highest level. Likewise, Auxerre's Stephane Guivarc'h. He has been given an extended chance but has still to prove himself internationally.

Guivarc'h, now 27, is a well-built striker who began his career with Brest, making his League debut nearly eight years ago. It was with then unfashionable Guingamp, however, that he made his name, scoring freely between 1992 and 1995, before moving to Auxerre for a season, Rennes for another, then back to Auxerre for the current championship.

In Europe this season, he has been a huge success, with five goals in eight games, and has already got on the scoresheet once in three appearances for France. He is Breton by birth, and might have stayed at Brest had the club not got into financial trouble.

At least he did not have a cable drop on him from the roof of the Stade de France during the arena's somewhat chaotic opening match. It fell on poor Didier Deschamps, so sourly and inaccurately dismissed as a "water carrier" by the abrasive Eric Cantona. Deschamps, only just back from injury, soldiered on like the good pro he is.

Another question is whether Christophe Dugarry will return to the reckoning. The lanky striker did well in last summer's international tournament and Sol Campbell, for one, can surely testify to his power in the air.

Now he is back in France with Marseille after two unhappy seasons with Milan and Barcelona. He is still only 26, but it is said that for all his many gifts, not least a polished technique, he lacks the killer instinct around the penalty area which marks out a natural goalscorer.

But, then again, who among the current French contestants does possess that killer instinct?

Klinsmann...another serious injury suffered in England

Big two join walking wounded

Sammer and Klinsmann face anxious wait

BERTI VOGTS has good reason to look gloomy. Barely had he named a provisional 40-strong World Cup squad without Matthias Sammer than skipper Jurgen Klinsmann joined him among the walking wounded.

Dortmund sweeper Sammer was omitted because he has yet to return to action after five operations last year on his troublesome knee. Klinsmann is now a doubt after shattering his jaw in a collision during Tottenham's 3-1 FA Cup replay defeat at Barnsley.

Vogts has said he will wait until the last possible minute for Sammer and now may have to apply the same criteria to Klinsmann. Although on form the Spurs veteran probably would not feature among Germany's top two strikers, Vogts is a great admirer of Klinsmann's leadership qualities.

Sammer keeps trying to reassure Vogts. He said: "I've started physical exercise which does not put too much pressure on the knee, but I won't be happy until I'm doing whole-body work."

Whether Sammer is among the Germany-based players being invited for medical tests shortly is uncertain. At this moment in time, there may be no point.

The foreign-based players have already been put through their paces, and Klinsmann, ironically before his facial injury, came through with flying colours.

Vogts says that the final 22 for France may not all come from the 40, adding: "Good performances in the League will be important, as well as character."

Squad selection, however, did offer encouragement to uncapped players such as Bayer Leverkusen's Carsten Ramelow and Carsten Jancker of Bayern Munich.

Jancker's Bayern strike partner, Giovane Elber, grabbed the glory when the Bundesliga resumed a month earlier than usual (to assist World Cup preparations). The Brazilian scored the fastest goal in Bundesliga history, after only 11 seconds against Hamburg, and added another in Bayern's 3-0 win. The performance offered some credence to coach Giovanni Trapattoni's claim that Bayern will win everything this season.

If life looks bright for Bayern, who thus moved within two points of leaders Kaiserslautern, it is quite the opposite for Hamburg, who slid to the bottom of the table and face relegation for the first time. Koln, bottom most of the season, moved up one place, thanks to a 3-2 win over Monchengladbach.

Kaiserslautern managed a 1-1 draw away to Schalke, having spent much of the game defending a ninth-minute lead secured with a speculative shot from Bulgarian midfielder Marian Hristov. Schalke eventually drew level through Dutch midfielder Marco Van Hoogdalem.

Hertha Berlin's new signing from Celtic, Andreas Thom, made an ideal start, scoring two minutes into his debut in a win over Wolfsburg. Another debut goal fell to Werder Bremen's Yuri Maximov, formerly of Kiev Dynamo, in their 2-1 win over Arminia Bielefeld.

World and European champions Borussia Dortmund lost their opening match of the year 2-1 away to Bochum. Dortmund appeared to miss the midfield energy of Portugal's Paulo Sousa, who has transferred back to Italy with Inter.

A further sign of unrest at the club emerged when goalkeeper Stefan Klos said he was determined to leave at the end of the season.

Klos, 26, is one of the side's few local lads and has been with the club since 1988, but is ready to take legal action if Dortmund try to invoke the one-year retention clause.

Nuclear knockout

A FORTHCOMING shipment of nuclear waste has forced the rescheduling of some Bundesliga fixtures.

Past rail shipments have drawn sometimes violent anti-nuclear demonstrations, so police will not have enough men available for football duties. Some games will be switched only by one day but more drastic alterations affect Arminia Bielefeld v Kaiserslautern, Bochum v Hertha, Schalke v Koln and Leverkusen v Borussia Dortmund. These games, all previously set for March 20 or 21, have been put back to April 29.

Keir Radnedge

Pro-file Stefan Effenberg

Gladbach's bad boy still has his fans

Club Borussia Monchengladbach
Born August 2, 1968, in Hamburg
Previous clubs Victoria Hamburg, Borussia Monchengladbach, Bayern Munich, Fiorentina (Ita)
International debut June 1991, v Wales
International caps 33 (5 goals)
Honours 1990 German Supercup (Bayern); 1993 US Cup (German national team); 1995 German Cup (Monchengladbach)

BORUSSIA MONCHENGLADBACH fans can rest easy once more. Stefan Effenberg is staying put – for the time being at least. The midfielder who lives in a maelstrom of controversy has decided that the gipsy life is no longer for him.

The report of a £4million bid from Tottenham Hotspur was certainly news to Effenberg himself, who said: "I only ever heard about this rumour from a newspaper. I have a contract here until the year 2000 and I will see it through."

But Borussia's mid-season placing of 13th in the Bundesliga, only two points above the relegation zone, raises questions over the long-term future of a 29-year-old who has a similar controversy quotient to Paul Gascoigne.

The Monchengladbach fans' favourite has upset more than his fair share of coaches, team-mates and supporters since he burst on the scene in 1987. On one occasion, during his early tearaway years, he took coach Udo Lattek's jeep for a joyride – and ended up crashing it.

His youthful talent was matched only by his arrogance. After transferring to Bayern Munich in 1990, his ingratiating words to his new fans ("the other clubs are too stupid to win the championship") infuriated the rest of German football. In case Bayern doubted Effenberg's commitment to good team spirit, he said: "Any player who wants my place can't be my friend. He is after my money and I'll do whatever it takes to defend myself."

Constant jeering at away matches provoked Effenberg's departure for Fiorentina in 1992. He became the club's captain – and then dismissed the Italian fans as "ignorant" when they jeered him in defeat.

Effenberg went on to plumb the depths of notoriety at the 1994 World Cup finals. First he upset national coach Berti Vogts by leaving the training camp to stay with wife Monica in a nearby hotel. Then he committed his greatest blunder with a rude, single-finger gesture to critical fans during the Germans' struggle to a 3-2 first round victory over South Korea in Dallas. Vogts substituted Effenberg and kicked him out of the squad.

Effenberg has since earned unusual recognition through his World Cup notoriety. A collage of Effenberg's response to the angry fans was a central feature of a recent art exhibition and Germans now refer to the gesture as 'making an Effe'. Asked lately what Dallas means to him, Effenberg said: "The assassination of President Kennedy. Nothing else."

After the incident, Effenberg returned to Monchengladbach. He was outstanding in last season's UEFA Cup win over Arsenal but did not see eye-to-eye with coach Hannes Bongartz, who dropped him at the start of this season because "Effenberg is not making enough effort in training". Within a month, however, Effenberg was back in the team.

Effenberg and his wife, who is also his agent, were again in the spotlight last year when they were fined £130,000 for allegedly assaulting a man outside their home. The Effenbergs appealed and, in September, after a five-hour hearing, had the conviction quashed.

Keir Radnedge

AUSTRIA

He was robbed...Michael Konsel

Ticket fever strikes as Manninger stakes his claim

Fans and players look ahead to France 98

AUSTRIA has gone football mad as the second half of the season opens, and thousands of fans plan to be in France for the minimum of three games the national team will play during the World Cup. The one problem is tickets, and many supporters will be disappointed; officially, Austria has been granted only some 3,000 per match.

Before the tournament coach Herbert Prohaska's team will play four friendlies at Vienna's Ernst Happel Stadium. Prohaska now looks certain to stay in place for the Euro 2000 qualifiers, when Austria will meet Spain, Israel, Cyprus and San Marino, and he seems to have a chance of taking them through to the finals. Austria have never made it that far so the record can only get better!

The enthusiasm for the game internationally is likely to be matched at home only if, perhaps, one of the Graz clubs can bring home the championship for the first time.

There has been a frenzy of activity in the transfer market, with the provincials to the fore. Linz have signed Stoger from Rapid, where he had been unhappy since the UEFA Cup tie with 1860 Munich, Schopp has joined Graz from Germany, and Hatz is returning from Lecce to assist Rapid. FK Austria hope to stiffen what may be a vain challenge for European football next term by taking on Kardoza from Adelaide Sharks. Salzburg do not have a new signing to parade and are on the verge of financial ruin.

Austria's No 1 goalkeeper Michael Konsel suffered a break-in at his Rome home while he was having a siesta. The Roma player had the consolation of having his contract extended to 2001, when he will be getting on for 40.

Even more remarkable is the rise of Alex Manninger. A year ago he was third-choice keeper at Arsenal. Now he is in the first team. Becoming the first Austrian in the English Premiership, he said, was all just chance, and he wondered if he was still dreaming after a clean sheet against Southampton.

With Arsenal's first-choice keeper, David Seaman, unlikely to play for up to another month, Manninger was facing fifth-round FA Cup, Coca-Cola Cup semi-final and more Premier League ties.

Manninger, a fresh-faced 20-year-old, has gone one step further than Rudi Hiden, an Austrian keeper whom Arsenal manager Herbert Chapman signed for the Gunners 65 years ago. However, Hiden was refused residency, actually being turned away by immigration at Dover, and had to return home. He went on to star with Racing Club in Paris.

Manninger is more fortunate, playing as he is in the era of the European Union, and with age on his side he could establish himself for a decade at Highbury.

A caustic Austrian commentator recently described the position of third-choice keeper in a World Cup squad as being on a par with assistant kit manager, but Otto Konrad (Zaragoza) and Wolfgang Knaller (Austria Vienna) may be wondering if they should book their holidays and forget France 98 while modest Manninger continues to make such progress.

Bob Vaughan

HOLLAND

Rijkaard joins Guus

FRANK RIJKAARD has been added to the national coaching team. With Johan Neeskens and Ronald Koeman already part of the set-up, Guus Hiddink now has three former internationals to assist him at the World Cup in France.

Many people say Rijkaard has been signed up to satisfy the large group of Surinam players in the squad. Since retiring in 1995, he has been concentrating on making a success of in business...selling underwear!

At the halfway point in the League, Ajax are a long way clear of PSV, with Vitesse, Feyenoord and Heerenveen the best-placed teams behind them.

Vitesse, with players like Kreek, Trustfull and top scorer Mahlas, should secure a UEFA Cup place. The same goes for Feyenoord, who are now under coach Leo Beenhakker.

Heerenveen have successfully replaced the likes of Jon Dahl Tomasson and Igor Korneyev with new stars such as Ruud Van Nistelrooy and Ali El Khattabi.

Willem II Tilburg started ambitiously by signing coach Co Adriaanse, who had been in charge of Ajax's youth system. However, his military-style discipline was not appreciated and he was almost fired because of poor results. Now that the team are used to his ideas, they are serious contenders for a UEFA Cup spot.

At the other end of the table, Volendam look like being relegated, while RKC, MVV, Groningen and De Graafschap are trying to avoid the play-offs with four Second Division clubs.

More and more 'Dutch' players will be competing with foreign teams at the World Cup. NAC midfielder Ernie Stewart, born in Holland of an American father, already has played in the World Cup with the USA; Sparta winger Moerad Amghizrad, raised in Holland, and Heerenveen striker Ali El Khattabi, born in Holland, may play for Morocco; Heerenveen keeper Hans Vonk, also raised in Holland, has been invited to play for his native country, South Africa.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

From pants to France...Frank Rijkaard

SWITZERLAND

Rolf under pressure

ROLF FRINGER, former national coach, has four months to justify his appointment as coach of Grasshopper. Fringer took over at the champions after the departure of Christian Gross, and he knows he has no room for error.

Fringer said: "We have to win the championship again and secure our place back in the Champions League. We were leading after the first round so we don't have the right to slip. For myself, I also understand the pressures. I am ambitious to win things but I accept that if I cannot do that with this club then people will question my ability to do so anywhere."

Grasshopper made no reinforcements of note during the winter break but did suffer one major loss when Romanian striker Viorel Moldovan left for Coventry. The consolation for Grasshopper was in considering the balance sheet. They paid £450,000 for Moldovan – and sold him for £4million.

St Gallen may prove the most persistent challengers. Victory in the major indoor tournament has given coach Roger Hegi and his men a valuable injection of confidence.

Keir Radnedge

BELGIUM

Fans reject merger

RIVAL supporters reacted with fury at speculation that RWDM, the perennial First Division strugglers who are facing bankruptcy, and Union Saint-Gilloise, who are in the doldrums, would solve their respective problems by merging.

As supporters of one of Belgium's oldest clubs – they celebrated their centenary last year – Union fans certainly don't fancy uprooting themselves from their endearing, ancient but ill-equipped ground, the Joseph Marien Stadium, and moving across Brussels.

Their new home would be the Edmond Machtens Stadium, used for the past 25 years by a club never too far away from an identity crisis following a series of mergers. These have left them with the tongue-twisting name of Racing White Daring Molenbeek.

Protests heard through a recent Union match made abundantly clear that fans were against the idea of a merger, even though the newly amalgamated club would have a place in the Second Division, one division better off than Union's current status.

"We won't move to Molenbeek," chanted supporters, who also made derisory noises in the direction of club vice-president Illi Michielsen, a former member of RWDM's management, who favoured the merger plan. This originally had been put forward by Henri Mabille, RWDM's former president, who suggested Brussels could not support the two clubs as well as Anderlecht.

At least the proposed name for the 'fused' club would have a certain charm. Iris FC, named after the flower that is the symbol of Brussels, would be an improvement on Royal Tilleur Football Club Liegeois, the clumsy title of the recently merged club in Liege.

Meanwhile, the recent slight upsurge in RWDM's fortunes – taking them to within sight of safety – has quietened the rumours a trifle. The 2-2 draw with Anderlecht and 2-0 win at Aalst coincided with the appointment of Guy Vandersmissen as coach. Less than a month after his 40th birthday, on Christmas Day, he had appeared as sweeper in his 568th First Division match.

It was also possibly his last, because the 4-0 home defeat by Germinal Ekeren, the club's seventh successive loss, signalled the end of Daniel Renders as coach. Vandersmissen, who was the club's Player of the Year last season, took over and said he would resume his playing career only in an emergency.

Nicholas Harling

REP IRELAND

All roads lead to the Balkans

NATIONAL coach Mick McCarthy summed up the Euro 2000 draw by saying: "It's a bit like gatecrashing the Balkan championship – even Malta have a Yugoslav coach!"

The Republic came out with Croatia, Yugoslavia, Macedonia and Malta, which means some awkward journeys and no guarantee of easy pickings.

Fans are making do with friendlies for the time being, notably Argentina, who play at Lansdowne Road on April 20. Before that there is a trip to the Czech Republic on March 25, and then Mexico will visit on May 23. Earlier that month an Irish XI will play a Premiership selection in a testimonial game for Paul McGrath.

Ian Butterworth, a former Norwich defender, is the new manager of First Division Cobh Ramblers. He replaces another Englishman, Stuart Ashton.

The 'Wimbledon for Dublin' campaign is on again. Dons chairman Sam Hammam has met the heads of several FAI clubs and engaged a top European solicitor, Jean-Louis Dupont, who won the Bosman case. Scottish club Clydebank also are thinking of moving to the city.

Sean Creedon

LUXEMBOURG

Canser steps down

LUXEMBOURG will go into their Euro 2000 group, which comprises Sweden, Poland, Bulgaria (again) and England, without midfielder Claude Canser. He has retired from international football, citing work commitments as his reason.

Coach Paul Philippe moved quickly to replace him by bringing Georges Fernandez into the full squad.

Friendlies are lined up with Cameroon on June 1 and Germany on June 5.

Tim Brice

Club Focus Club Brugge

Nick Bidwell on the runaway Belgian leaders

Taking possession...Brugge are on course to regain the League title

GOALKEEPERS

Dany Verlinden	34
Jurgen Belpaire	25

DEFENDERS

Eric Delflandre	24
Eric Addo	19
Ivan Ilic	25
Pascal Renier	26
Nzelo Lembi	22
Vital Borkelmans	34

MIDFIELDERS

Lorenzo Staelens	33
Franky Van Der Elst	36
Sven Vermant	24
Darko Anic	26
Tjorven De Brul	24
Mohammed Sillah	21

FORWARDS

Gert Verheyen	27
Gert Claessens	25
Khalilou Fadiga	23
Nordin Jbari	22
Edgar Jankauskas	22

THEY ARE a mean-spirited lot at Club Brugge. They were no fewer than 12 points clear at the top of the Belgian table a handful of weeks into the New Year, and seemed intent on wringing every last drop of interest from the national scene. If the competition and ratings-obsessed local TV moguls disapprove, too bad.

Brugge, so disappointed to lose out to the rank outsiders Lierse in last season's championship run-in, seem doubly determined to ensure there will be no similar slips during 97-98.

They were unbeaten in their first 19 games, during which they dropped only six points, and the 'Blauw-Zwart' (Blue and Blacks) are chugging merrily down Formality Road en route to their fourth League title of the 90s and the 11th since the club were founded in 1891.

Doubters might argue that Brugge are merely the strongest of a puny First Division, pointing to the current demise of traditional powerhouses Anderlecht and Standard Liege and adding that Club's limitations were revealed when losing to lowly Bundesliga side Bochum in the second round of the UEFA Cup last November.

Yet Brugge can deal only with the domestic opposition put before them, and in this sense they have passed virtually every examination this season with honours.

They took maximum points from potentially awkward trips to Standard Liege and Lierse, beat arch-rivals Anderlecht 2-1 at the Brugge Olympiastadion, and swatted aside the country's latest championship pretenders, Genk and Harelbeke.

Judging by the events of the past year or two, Club coach and former Belgian international full-back Eric Gerets soon could be in a position to market his formula for winning teams. Last season he masterminded small-town Lierse's against-the-odds championship success; now, after taking over from the Mouscron-bound Hugo Broos at Brugge, he is again top of the pile, though admittedly with a much stronger squad than he had at Lierse.

"I'm not surprised at all by all the success Eric has had," says Belgian managerial great Raymond Goethals, whose coaching CV includes the Belgian national team, Anderlecht, Standard Liege and Marseille.

"I always thought he would make a marvellous coach. He was a player who loved responsibility, a natural leader. It's logical he turned to coaching and that he would be good at it.

"As a player he was so enthusiastic, totally committed and always attack-minded. And he's the same as a coach. His Brugge side is as positive and spectacular as you're likely to get. He's also worked hard to organise the defence and I've been impressed by the quality of their set-piece plays, too. Eric thinks hard about the game and has plenty of tricks up his sleeve."

Teenage Ghanaian Addo aside, Brugge continue to rely heavily on the durable 30-something spine formed by keeper Verlinden, left-back Borkelmans, and midfield grafters Staelens and Van Der Elst. But it is in attack that the Club class of 97-98 are finding most championship momentum, despite the early-season sale of star Croat striker Robert Spehar to Monaco.

Summer signings Khalilou Fadiga (ex-Lommel) and Nordin Jbari (ex-Gent) have both looked the part up front thanks to their skill and mobility, while Belgian internationals Gert Verheyen and Gert Claessens, plus recently acquired Lithuanian starlet Edgar Jankauskas, have been tucking away chances with almost monotonous regularity.

Just a few more goals from their quintet of front-running talent and the League title will be Club Brugge property long before the championship curtain falls on May 17.

Key man...Claessens

MEN TO WATCH

Edgar JANKAUSKAS
Brugge pipped Holland's Feyenoord for the signature of this Lithuanian international striker, paying CSKA Moscow £1.1million. He has been an instant hit in Belgium, with five goals in his first eight starts.

Gert CLAESSENS
Extremely strong in the air and a dead-eye finisher in front of goal. Brugge's leading marksman this season, Claessens has scored 10 goals in 19 games. Versatile enough to line up in midfield or attack, and is a certainty to figure in Belgium's World Cup party.

Eric ADDO
See profile, page 48.

Head lad...Shearer's return to action has brightened Newcastle's gloomy season

The wrong Toon

Things can only get better for Kenny Dalglish and Newcastle, says Gavin Hamilton

FOR NEWCASTLE UNITED's fans, their hopes heightened by the hype and hedonism of Kevin Keegan, adapting to life under Kenny Dalglish has not been easy. Not even the return from injury, a month earlier than expected, of Alan Shearer can disguise the fact that it has been a miserable season so far at St James' Park. A number of factors have contributed to the gloom, not least the club's transfer activities, or rather lack of them.

Last year's share flotation has effectively tied Dalglish's hands in the transfer market. The club, like many others in the Premiership, now has to produce performances that impress investors in the City just as much as fans in the stands. So, last August, Tottenham's £6million bid for 30-year-old Les Ferdinand was accepted by the Newcastle board. And the £6.1million Parma offered to buy back Tino Asprilla last month, only £600,000 less than Newcastle paid for the Colombian in February 1996, was also viewed as good business. However, with Shearer out following a serious pre-season injury, Asprilla's return to Italy left Dalglish with Ian Rush (now aged 35) as his only recognised striker.

Since taking over from the free-spending Keegan this time last year, Dalglish has sold Ferdinand, Asprilla, David Ginola (to Tottenham), Peter Beardsley and Robbie Elliott (both to Bolton) for a combined total of £19.5million. His outlay in the transfer market, including the most recent signings Andreas Andersson (Milan, £3m) and Andrew Griffin (Stoke, £1.5m), has been £13.3million. That represents good business for the money men, but at pitch level things have not looked so promising.

While Keegan was the wild romantic, Dalglish is the arch pragmatist. Under Keegan, Newcastle's attacking play was at times a joy to watch. Under Dalglish, the team have been (the 3-2 defeat of Barcelona excepted) dull and defensive. Without Shearer's firepower, Newcastle have struggled in the League, failed to qualify for the Champions League quarter-finals and were knocked out of the League Cup by Liverpool. That left the FA Cup as the only realistic route to a trophy, where mighty Stevenage stood in their way in the fourth round. Newcastle foolishly tried to bully the non-League side into switching the tie to St James' Park, where Newcastle would get an easier ride and Stevenage a big pay day. Stevenage stood their ground (the presence of Sky TV cameras ensured they were rewarded financially) and Newcastle got to play at St James' Park after all – a 1-1 draw at Stevenage meant a replay in Newcastle.

In Dalglish's defence, he has been left to deal with the downside of the Keegan era, namely the lack of a youth policy or even a reserve side. Faced with a dearth of senior strikers, most managers can at least give one of their youngsters a run-out in the first team. Dalglish has been unable to do that. Darren Huckerby, who left because of a lack of reserve team opportunities under Keegan and is now a big hit at Coventry, is one player who could have potentially saved Newcastle's season.

Dalglish has reintroduced a reserve team, and a youth policy is also in place. Bobby Robson was approached last summer to oversee the changes and may yet return to his roots when his contract with Barcelona ends this summer. Whether Dalglish is around to reap the benefits remains to be seen. A little like his team, the manager's mood has been dour and reserved.

The return of Shearer is bound to give the team a lift, and Andersson, who had an impressive scoring record in Sweden before moving to the bench at Milan, could also create a few sparks. However, Newcastle's fortunes this season are a cautionary reminder in the cash-obsessed 1990s of how difficult it can be to buy success.

ENGLAND

Bungs: Clough charged

THE LONG-AWAITED FA 'bungs' inquiry ended last month with charges against three people: former Nottingham Forest manager Brian Clough, his assistant Ronnie Fenton and former Arsenal chief scout Steve Burtenshaw. All had been accused of personally benefiting from transfers.

The FA insisted the charges were proof of how determined it was to root out corruption. All three men are likely to be banned from the game for a prolonged period. However, only Burtenshaw is currently employed in football, at QPR, while Clough, the inquiry's biggest catch, is in poor health. The only person punished so far is the former Arsenal manager George Graham, now back in the game at Leeds.

Another prominent football figure to fall foul of authority is Terry Venables, who has been banned for seven years from acting as a company director. The ban followed an investigation into his business affairs by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Venables has since ended his involvement with Portsmouth (currently bottom of Division One) and vowed to stick to coaching.

On the transfer front, Andy Hinchcliffe has left Everton, but not for Tottenham as expected. The move to London fell through after the player failed a fitness test; Hinchcliffe moved to Sheffield Wednesday instead. Everton have placed captain Gary Speed on the transfer list after rejecting bids from Newcastle and Sheffield Wednesday.

Manchester United have sold Karel Poborsky to Benfica after the Czech Republic international failed to win a regular place in the United first team. Benfica also bought striker Brian Deane from Sheffield United.

French defender Patrick Blondeau has returned to France after failing to establish himself at Sheffield Wednesday following a summer move from Monaco.

Crystal Palace, impressive away from home but without a League win at Selhurst Park all season, splashed out £2.5million on French Under-21 defender Valerien Ismael and took on Tomas Brolin. The Swede had been in contractual limbo since falling out with Leeds last season.

Gavin Hamilton

SCOTLAND

Wrangles mar Celtic surge

AS CELTIC produce their most potent challenge in the championship for years, internal wrangling threatens to destroy all the good on-field work that the players have produced.

With Wim Jansen's men desperately trying to prevent Rangers from achieving their 10th successive title, stories continually emerge from Parkhead which suggest damaging in-fighting behind the scenes.

Shortly after Davie Hay, one of the most respected players in Celtic's modern history, had been sacked as chief scout, a series of allegations emerged suggesting that chairman Fergus McCann was trying hard to rid the club of its perceived Roman Catholic image with a view to achieving credibility within the high-powered financial circles to which the top tier of Scottish football now aspires.

Around the same time came the story that Jansen and general manager Jock Brown had fallen out due to a difference of opinion. No official confirmation or denial was made by the club concerning these rumours, but McCann has become involved in something of a war of words, with unnamed individuals described as "Catholic bigots".

His remarks seemed aimed at Hay and ex-manager Tommy Burns, both regarded as strong Celtic traditionalists whose philosophies may well have been at odds with the "all colour or creed" image which the chairman is trying to portray.

On the field, Norwegian international Harald Brattbakk is beginning to find his way in the Scottish game, opening his scoring account in the Scottish Cup victory over Greenock Morton and appearing to have formed a good understanding with fellow Scandinavian Henrik Larsson.

Celtic are determined to take advantage of recent lapses by Rangers, who faltered during the absence of the free-scoring Marco Negri after he suffered an eye injury when playing squash with fellow Italian Sergio Porrini.

Hearts continue to defy their critics with a continuing series of good results, and it now appears likely that the championship race will comprise a genuine three-horse race to the finish, for the first time in years.

Talks are continuing about a breakaway 10-team Premiership next season, with chairmen trying to work out a deal that will be regarded as beneficial to all. Somewhat ironically, the main spokesman for the breakaway is Hibernian managing director Lex Gold, whose club have suffered a disastrous run and are now entrenched at the bottom.

Alan Fairley

N. IRELAND

Billy back as boss

AFTER five weeks of searching, Glenavon finally appointed a new manager to replace Nigel Best. The new man is Billy Hamilton, one of the heroes from the glory days of the World Cup finals of 1982 in Spain.

Hamilton, who won 42 caps, had taken a rest from the game for two years following managerial stints at Limerick in the League of Ireland and Distillery, and seemed quite content to devote his time to a trophy-engraving business, but said he could not resist the "fantastic potential of Glenavon".

Now the ebullient Hamilton will be hoping to engrave the club's name on trophies in future. Probably not the League title, for the Lurgan Blues are too far behind Cliftonville and Portadown, but perhaps the Irish Cup, which Glenavon won last season.

They made a good start in that competition when they repeated last year's Final victory to defeat Cliftonville 2-0 away. Tony Grant, who scored the only goal against the same opponents nine months ago, got both this time.

If Glenavon are to succeed they will have to do it without highly rated Glenn Ferguson, who made clear that he did not want to remain at Mourneview Park due to the attitude of some 'supporters'. Reluctantly, Glenavon had to bow to the inevitable and he was transferred to Linfield for an Irish League record of £55,000. Linfield supporters were so keen to get Ferguson that they paid £35,000 of the fee.

The shock of the Cup's first round was the 2-0 home defeat of Ards by an intermediate club, Institute of Londonderry.

Roy Kitson

WALES

Home is best, even if it's away

AFTER the Euro 2000 qualifying draw, the talk was not so much of who the opponents were, but where the home fixtures would be played.

The cash-strapped FAW are faced with an unenviable dilemma, as the National Stadium will not be available until early 1999 due to virtually total reconstruction. With such potentially lucrative visitors as Denmark and Italy, a venue of suitable size is not available. Hard choices are necessary.

The FAW are to consider playing Italy at Liverpool's Anfield ground and Denmark at Old Trafford, Manchester – subject to UEFA ratification. This would enable them to maximise financial income from these matches, but would mean conceding home advantage. The home ties against Belarus and Switzerland are deemed suitable for other domestic stadia.

There is a large body of opinion that playing both the group favourites at home is an absolute necessity if Wales are to have any chance of snatching first or second spot. Initial remarks by manager Bobby Gould and FAW officials which put financial benefits before qualification were seen as capitulation.

Although Gould clarified the situation following pressure from his top players, the governing body are still thought to favour English venues, having the long-term financial view in mind.

In the League, Barry Town continue to steam ahead, with Inter CableTel, Cwmbran Town, Bangor City and Newtown gunning for the other European places.

Mel Ap Ior Thomas

Club Focus Hearts

Alan Fairley on a real threat to the Old Firm

Seasoned campaigner...John Robertson

FOR TOO many Hearts supporters, the current ascendancy the Edinburgh club are enjoying is tempered by harrowing recollections of 1985-86. Even now horrific images leap into the minds of maroon-clad supporters, of uncontrollable weeping on the old terraces at Dens Park where, on the last day of that season, Dundee inflicted on their team an infamous 2-0 defeat which, coupled with results elsewhere, ensured that Celtic would take the championship on goal difference.

Seven days later, Hearts were defeated by Aberdeen in the Scottish Cup Final at Hampden, and a season that had promised so much ended with the team having nothing to show for their efforts.

The club fanzine, *Always the Bridesmaid*, has perhaps the most poignant title of all such publications, and the justification for the name was strengthened when Hearts took part in two domestic finals in 1996 but returned to Edinburgh after each clutching only runners-up medals.

So will this year be any different? Can the current squad aspire to what no Hearts team has achieved since 1963 – a major trophy?

Manager Jim Jefferies, a defensive stalwart at the club in the mid-70s, appears confident enough. Even after back-to-back defeats by Rangers and Celtic in December, Jefferies defiantly maintained that it was possible to win the League without necessarily having to defeat the Old Firm.

Mathematically he may have been correct, though many felt at the time that Hearts were not equipped to sustain a meaningful challenge. Now, most neutrals are pleasantly surprised that Jefferies and his men have so far proved the critics wrong. They entered the final third of the season very much in contention for the title along with their two Glasgow rivals.

Jefferies has moulded a team from a squad who give him many options. Foreign imports such as Stephane Adam from Metz in France and former Austria Vienna striker Thomas Flogel have dovetailed nicely into a blend of strength and skill.

Neil McCann (described, perhaps uncharitably, by Scotland coach Craig Brown as the poor man's Ryan Giggs) and Stevie Fulton, who also suffers from an ill-judged comparison with Roberto Baggio (made many years ago by then Celtic boss Billy McNeill), have been outstanding.

Then there is the experience of seasoned professionals such as John Robertson and Davie McPherson, and a sprinkling of talented youngsters like Gary Naismith, Alan McManus and Paul Ritchie.

The mid-season signing of Angolan international Jose Quitongo has given Jefferies an additional option, but perhaps the most influential player is Colin Cameron, signed from Raith Rovers towards the end of last season. He has developed into one of Scottish football's finest talents.

With Tynecastle having recently undergone a massive refurbishment, the impressive new stadium now needs only a trophy to complete its transformation, and the current side appear well equipped to oblige. Only when that happens will the ghost of 1986 be fully exorcised.

GOALKEEPERS

Gilles Rousset	Aged 34
Myles Hogarth	22

DEFENDERS

Alan McManus	23
Dave McPherson	34
Gary Naismith	19
Neil Pointon	33
Paul Ritchie	22
David Weir	27

MIDFIELD

Colin Cameron	25
Steve Fulton	27
Gary Locke	22
Stefano Salvatori	30
Jose Quitongo	23

FORWARDS

Stephane Adam	28
Thomas Flogel	26
Jim Hamilton	22
Neil McCann	23
John Robertson	33

Influential...Colin Cameron

MEN TO WATCH

John ROBERTSON
Aged 33, he has spent virtually all his career with Hearts and is the sole survivor from the ill-fated side of 1986.

Steve FULTON
Once described as 'the new Baggio', and at last displaying the consistency which eluded him during spells with Celtic and Falkirk.

Colin CAMERON
His game has improved dramatically since joining Hearts from Raith Rovers and he is now in contention for an international call-up.

EUROPE

GREECE

Anghel moves in

ROMANIAN Anghel Iordanescu has been appointed to coach the Greek national squad, and will take over as soon as his existing commitment to Romania ends at this year's World Cup in France.

EPO, the Greek FA, did not release any details of the two-year contract with 48-year-old Iordanescu, who has coached Romania to the last two World Cup finals. He replaces Kostas Polhroniou.

Polish striker Krzysztof Warzycha became the top scorer of all time for Panathinaikos, after leading the club to a 5-2 win at Apollon.

Two goals lifted 33-year-old Warzycha on to the 182 mark, breaking the record set by Antonis Antoniadis in 1981.

"I thank the fans and my fellow players who helped me through the years here," said Warzycha, who scored his record-shattering goal on the pitch where he scored his first in Greece, in 1990.

The government welcomed a proposal by the Turkish Football Federation that Greece and Turkey co-host the European Championships in 2004, despite the two countries being at odds over rights in the Aegean Sea and other issues.

Government spokesman Dimitris Reppas said the decision to bid would lie with the Greek sporting authorities.

Lou Economopoulos

Coming soon...Anghel Iordanescu

TURKEY

Hagi hits out

THE NATIONAL team's 4-1 home defeat by Albania caused widespread dismay and led to strong criticism by one of Turkish football's top players, Romanian midfielder Gheorghe Hagi.

The team's display in Antalya was too bad to be true, and Hagi, who plays for Galatasaray, said that Turkish players have still to learn how to behave like professionals.

"They should play abroad, but are too timid to do so," he said. "Foreign players and coaches have made some improvement to Turkish football, but not enough to make an impact."

Turkish players are reluctant to go abroad because of the tax situation. In Turkey, clubs pay the income tax and players get their salaries without deduction. But a player going abroad can expect to lose at least 40 per cent of his earnings.

As a result, players do not feel a compulsion to go abroad, where discipline and training are also likely to be tougher than they are at home.

Discipline was a topic at Besiktas, where Nigerian striker Daniel Amokachi reported back late after going to Lagos to attend the wedding of his friend, Fenerbahce player Jay-Jay Okocha.

"Amokachi makes a habit of breaking the rules," said coach John Toshack. "He did it last season and should have been fined, but wasn't. I'm trying to keep discipline in the squad."

Amokachi did not escape so lightly this time: he was fined £14,000, though he did not lose his place in the squad.

Fenerbahce are joint top with Trabzonspor on 41 points, Galatasaray are third on 39, Istanbulspor fourth on 37 and Besiktas fifth on 34.

Hasan Cemali

ISRAEL

Scharf goes for the new look

NATIONAL coach Shlomo Scharf named 10 newcomers in an experimental preliminary squad preparing for the European Championship.

Eight were called up from the Under-21 side, while midfielder Motti Ohayon and forward Liron Bassis were drafted into the international set-up for the first time. All 24 members of the relatively inexperienced squad play for Israeli clubs.

"I cannot rely on the players currently abroad because they won't all be able to come for all the friendlies, so this is a good chance to try out some young players," said Scharf.

He and his assistant Yitzhak Shum had their contracts extended until 2000, and speculation that Scharf might leave to take a coaching position with Maccabi Haifa were flatly denied.

Of the Israelis playing abroad, Tal Banin of Brescia, Haim Revivo of Celta Vigo, Avi Nimni of Atletico Madrid, Eyal Berkovic of West Ham and Alon Hazan of Watford all look certainties for the eventual squad.

The National League looks to be hotting up into a four-horse race, with Hapoel Tel Aviv, Betar Jerusalem, Hapoel Haifa and Maccabi Haifa pulling away from the rest. Only five points separate the four.

Maccabi Tel Aviv's luck appears to have deserted them completely and they look destined for their worst finish in living memory, despite the efforts of veteran captain Eli Driks, who has scored 11 of their 18 League goals.

The women's game has established itself with the formation of a handful of club sides, and a regular League is expected to begin next season.

Oris Lewis

ALBANIA

Youngsters make a big impact

"A BIG success for our younger generation, and one of the greatest successes in our history." That was the summing up by national coach Astrit Hafizi after a 4-1 away win over Turkey in Antalya.

Altin Rakli scored the first two goals, with Alban Bushi and Mahir Halili completing the demolition.

Hafizi is looking forward to the European Championship with renewed confidence, and says: "We now have the ability to get some very good results."

Albania are in the same group as Norway, Slovenia, Georgia, Latvia and neighbours Greece.

Partizani and Vllaznia topped the League with 37 points, followed by the champions, Tirana, with 33.

Striker Erion Bogdani has had most to do with Partizani's success, scoring 14 times in his 17 appearances.

Gezim Nushi

On the Tyne...Andreas Andersson

SWEDEN

Andreas finds new partner

ALTHOUGH one of the greatest inside-forward trios in Milan's history, the legendary GRE-NO-LI (Gren, Nordahl and Liedholm), hailed from Sweden, in recent times the Swedes have failed to set San Siro alight.

Jesper Blomqvist and Andreas Andersson were signed from IFK Gothenburg, but soon left. Blomqvist is currently playing on loan for Parma, while Andersson joined Newcastle in a £3million transfer.

Milan's erratic form meant that Andersson never had the luxury of a settling-down period. He is a quality forward and unselfish enough to do well as Alan Shearer's partner.

Sweden's first full international under Tommy Soderberg ended in an unimpressive 1-0 defeat by the USA. Although it was an experimental team, without any foreign-based stars, Sweden's lack of attacking punch alarmed local experts.

Soderberg has promised that Sweden will be more adventurous in the future, but he has a lot to do before the European Championship qualifiers.

A long-running transfer saga ended when Malmo's international stopper, Christian Karlsson, joined IFK. Karlsson, 28, first hit the headlines with Trelleborgs when they knocked Blackburn out of the UEFA Cup in 1994.

Malmo did not want to sell him – not to Gothenburg, anyway – but the player had fallen out with coach Frans Thijssen.

Pentti Hietanen

FINLAND

Ismo springs a surprise

ISMO LIUS surprised a few people by joining FC MyPa from RPS Rovaniemi.

Lius has only one ambition left as a player; to become the highest-ever scorer in the Finnish League. At the moment he has 188 goals – 18 below the current record – and at 32 he has ample time to achieve his target.

He previously played for Kuusysi Lahti and HJK Helsinki, and has won 35 caps, but for some reason he has never been a regular starter for Finland. His attempts to begin a professional career abroad in Switzerland, Belgium and Sweden all failed.

Pentti Hietanen

NORWAY

Skammelsrud heads for Germany

CLUB CAPTAIN Bent Skammelsrud became the second Rosenborg player to leave after this winter's Champions League exploits. The 31-year-old midfielder opted for Bayer Leverkusen after nearly signing for their Bundesliga rivals Koln.

Skammelsrud had seven successful seasons with Rosenborg after starting his career with Frigg Oslo and Swedish club Malmo. His authority and leadership qualities made him a natural captain.

Rosenborg will be hard pushed to replace Skammelsrud. From his central midfield position he orchestrated the team's play and contributed his fair share of goals from long-range. He could also be called upon to cover as a central defender.

Despite his age Skammelsrud should have many good seasons left in him and the German style of play should suit him well.

Another Norwegian to make the headlines in European football lately is Steinar Nilsen. Having done well for his club Tromso in the European Cup-winners Cup, he was signed by Milan and made his debut against Bologna.

However, after scoring in the 5-0 thrashing of rivals Inter in the Italian Cup, Nilsen was injured following a rash tackle from Ronaldo and may now miss the rest of the season.

The domestic clubs in Norway have been taking part in indoor tournaments as they prepare for the coming season. Most of the clubs also go abroad to train and Lillestrom beat Rosenborg 2-0 in a build-up match...played in South Africa.

Sigurd Odegaard

There at Bayer...Bent Skammelsrud

DENMARK

Copenhagen's bid to be the best

FC COPENHAGEN began the next stage of their ambitious plans to become the best club in Denmark by making two high-profile signings.

After going public as a company on the Danish stock exchange, they also received a major financial boost with a three-year kit deal with Umbro.

Then came the swoop for two rising talents of the Danish game, Thomas Rytter and Thomas Thorninger. Significantly, both men were lured home from abroad. Midfielder Rytter had spent an uneasy few months at Spanish club Seville after leaving Lyngby; Thorninger had gone to Perugia in Italy from AGF Aarhus, but also failed to settle. He will be the focus of Copenhagen's attack in the second half of the season.

The club also bought two promising teenagers, striker Martin Larsen from Svendborg and goalkeeper Kenneth Jorgensen from FB, to supplement their squad.

One man leaving was Morten Nielsen, who moved abroad to Strasbourg in France. The peripatetic Stig Tofting moved again, too. He quit troubled OB Odense for a two-year contract at MSV Duisburg.

Meanwhile, 20-year-old talent Kenny Thorup joined AGF from Hvidovre, and neighbours Aab Aalborg considered the benefits of a share issue.

Jim Holden

PORTUGAL

Graeme against the gossips

LISBON'S gossip machine is making life difficult for Benfica coach Graeme Souness. He is trying to rebuild the team (and defend his reputation) but not a day goes by without some fictitious tale appearing in the press.

Souness, naturally, likes British players and knows how to play to their strengths. But the rumour factory is operating at such high power that he can hardly mention a name in casual conversation without the headlines saying he has made a 'proposed deal'. One story was particularly hurtful, spreading a rumour that the fees involved in two recent signings, Karel Poborsky and Brian Deane, had not yet been paid. How, we ask, would Manchester United and Sheffield United have let such players go without money changing hands? And if it is true, what are the arrangements behind the deals?

Meanwhile, there is growing concern that traditional Portuguese clubs are going to disappear, at least in their present form. Speculators are said to be raising capital under new companies and trying to take over the assets of some existing clubs while ignoring responsibility for debts. The main object, apparently, is for grounds to be demolished to make way for luxury flats, which will then sell for millions.

As I forecast last month, Benfica chairman Vale e Azevedo has upset some *socios*, who question his involvement with controversial plans for the future. These fans fear the destruction of their famous old club, saying even the Stadium of Light is in danger, and have printed pamphlets urging people to unite and defend the club.

Azevedo is aware of all this feeling, but also is aware that he needs Souness to provide him with a team capable of winning something. The coach, criticised by a former Benfica great, European Cup-winner Antonio Simoes, for not recruiting Portuguese players, replied: "They are too expensive."

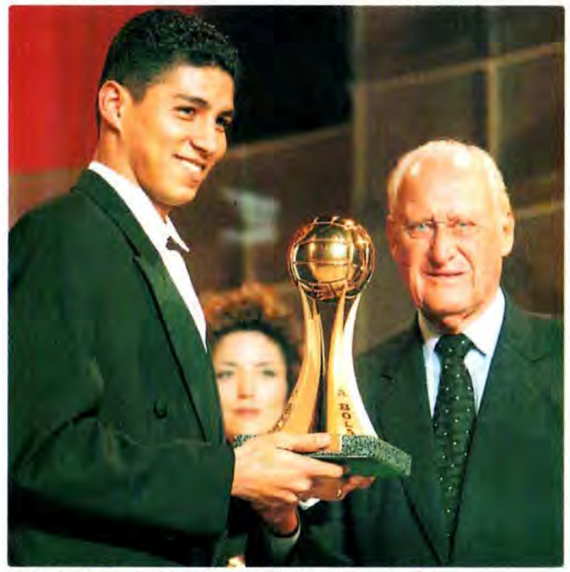
At almost the same time, Benfica were selling Paraguayan international Gamarra, a truly great player, to help make ends meet. What a disgrace!

Alberto Da Silva

● Porto lost for the first time this season when they went down 1-0 to bottom-of-the-table, relegation-bound Belenenses. But they remained 13 points clear of Benfica, who had suddenly shot up into second place thanks to a 2-0 win over Vitoria Setubal. Both goals were scored by Nuno Gomes, who was being watched by Leeds United manager George Graham.

● Despite drawing a blank against Belenenses, Porto's Brazilian striker Mario Jardel remained Portugal's top scorer with 17 goals. He also collected the Footballer of the Year award at a gala organised by the *A Bola* newspaper. Appropriately, Jardel received his trophy from another Brazilian guest of honour, FIFA president Joao Havelange.

Keir Radnedge



That'll do nicely...Jardel receives his award from Joao Havelange

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Crying Wolf...Ivanov may have got the wrong side of Hristo Bonev once too often

BULGARIA

Ivanov may miss World Cup

TRIFON IVANOV, a cult figure with over 70 caps, looks to be dealing himself out of Bulgaria's squad for the World Cup.

The management and coach at Rapid Vienna appear to have run out of patience with the 'wild man', whose absences from training and other escapades had been overlooked for so long.

Ivanov looks set to play Second Division football for the second half of the season, and Bulgarian coach Hristo Bonev is unlikely to appreciate his sharp-shooting defender playing at a lower level.

Bonev also needs to check on the fitness of 'the great man' – Hristo Stoichkov – before the forthcoming visit to Argentina for a friendly. He has been absent from Barcelona's first team – and even the squad – for much of the season.

Some of the veterans of Bulgaria's previous World Cup and European Championship campaigns are wintering better than others. Despite Compostela being just one spot above the relegation zone in the Spanish top flight, Luboslav Penev is fifth equal in the scoring charts.

He looks a certainty for the France squad despite his opposition in the past to his uncle's successor, Bonev.

A celebratory coaching jamboree is planned for later in the spring, with international and UEFA support and participation.

This is the 50th anniversary year of the foundation of the BFU's coaching school, which has an excellent reputation in south-east Europe and has taught 4,000 coaches the ABC of the game.

Bob Vaughan

HUNGARY

Time for a change

WE WAIT to see whether the recent FA conference will improve football fortunes when the season reopens.

The national team are due to take on Austria in Vienna, and both sets of fans are longing for a return to the days of Puskas versus Ocwirk.

In the case of the Hungarians those days could be as far off in the future as they are in the past. The Federation has no money and even youth football is reported not to be receiving any funds from betting on sport.

At least champions MTK remain well heeled as they attempt to catch Gyoer. 'Fradi' may be too far behind to have a realistic chance of reaching the Champions League qualifying rounds but Ujpest could be dark horses.

Euro 2000 is on the horizon for national coach Janos Csank, who needs a good result in Vienna and probably some more friendlies before beginning the Euro campaign in early September. At least the derbies with the Slovaks and the Romanians are something to look forward to after the gloom of 1997.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Straight into action

NO SOONER was Dusan Uhrin's successor as national coach in place than the draw for Euro 2000 was upon him. And Jozef Chovanec and his staff, drawn with weak opposition, apart from Scotland, have already forgotten disastrous 1997 and begun to plan.

Chovanec, however, seems not to have quite the total say Uhrin did. He will be responsible for coaching the national team but there will be a manager in overall charge of full international football at the Czech FA.

Chovanec wanted to have Jan Stejskal as his goalkeeping coach, but he has declined the offer, to go on playing. So Ivo Viktor is continuing to look after the keepers, among whom Petr Kouba will be seeking to resurrect his career after spells in the reserves at both Deportivo and Kaiserslautern.

Srnicek and Miklosko are also out of favour at their clubs, so perhaps it is time to give Liberec's Ladislav Maier an extended run.

ROMANIA

Anghel set to leave

NO MATTER what happens at the World Cup, the national team will be under new management come the qualifying games for Euro 2000.

Anghel Iordanescu will leave after the tournament to coach the Greek national side and will earn the sort of money he never could get at home. His will be a hard act to follow, after Italia 90, USA 94 and qualification, if not success, at Euro 96.

Of those players not based abroad or with Steaua, only Dinamo keeper Prunea and Popescu of 'U' Craiova seem to have much chance of making France 98.

At home, Steaua will be trying to beat off the title challenge at last being mounted by Rapid.

Bob Vaughan

RUSSIA

Khaka cracker

A NOSTALGIC tournament turned into a useful workout when the 16-team CIS Cup was played under cover at Moscow's Red Army Arena.

All 15 countries from the former USSR were represented, as well as the Russian national youth team.

Kiev Dynamo were well worth their victory, scoring 19 goals in their six games without conceding one. In the Final they beat Moscow Spartak 1-0 with a brilliant goal from Khaka Kaladze. So Ukraine beat Russia with a goal by a Georgian.

It was Kiev's third win in a row, Moscow Spartak taking the trophy in each of its first three years.

Victor Gusev

Keeping hopeful...Petr Kouba could be back in favour with the Czech national team

UKRAINE

Kiev supreme

AFTER five successive championships and a strong showing in the Champions Cup, Kiev Dynamo scooped nearly all the honours at the end of the old year.

Andrei Shevchenko was voted Best Player, strike partner Sergei Rebrov was second and club captain Yury Kalitvintsev third. Valery Lobanovsky was Coach of the Year, and Gregory Surkis President of the Year.

National coach Jozsef Szabo has said Ukraine have a very good chance of qualifying for Euro 2000 after being drawn in the same group as Russia, France, Iceland, Armenia and Andorra.

Oleg Zadernovsky

POLAND

England...AGAIN!

"It could not be worse!"

"England...Why again?"

So read the headlines after the Euro 2000 draw, which also grouped Poland with Bulgaria, Sweden and Luxembourg.

But England are the most unwanted rivals. For 25 years they have been stronger than the Poles, defeating them in the 1986 World Cup finals, plus the '90, '94, '98 World Cup and Euro 92 qualifiers. The most optimistic person is national coach, Janusz Wojcik.

He said: "I have no complex about the English. Why? I beat England as coach of the Polish Under-21 side. Many players of that team are still playing for my team."

At home, Wisla Krakow have been saved from bankruptcy by the owners of a cable TV company Tele-Fonika. It is estimated that they have invested up to £12million on new players

Dariusz Kurowski

CROATIA

Tension bubbles under

THERE is an air of euphoria in Croatia these days, with the World Cup looming and some excellent play by Croatia Zagreb in the UEFA Cup.

But there also is tension in the air, and the pairing of Croatia with Yugoslavia in the Euro 2000 qualifiers is a cause for regret. The organisers would have done everyone a favour if they had placed all the five countries that used to make up Yugoslavia into separate groups.

FC Croatia did their bit towards spreading peaceful coexistence by signing Damir Stojak, a Croatian, from a Yugoslavian club, Vojvodina Novi Sad. How he will settle in what could be a hostile environment is another matter.

Zdravko Reic

IN BRIEF

IN SLOVAKIA...

Election time is approaching, and the decision about who will run the FA for the next four years is getting closer.

Jo Venglos, about the only Slovak coach or administrator known in much of Europe, is still the only candidate for the presidency in succession to Milan Sluzanic, who is felt to have done a solid job.

There could be a last-minute effort by either Julius Rezes, the Kosice president, or his father, the owner of Sparta Prague.

Venglos has said that if he is elected, things will have to be done his way.

National coach Jozef Jankech will be hoping that the League can be reduced from the absurdly high number of 16 clubs. The watering down of quality is not helping the national team, who started the year with a 3-0 defeat in Italy.

Fifteen players got a run out, including captain Moravcik, who missed much of last season through injury and still seems unable to decide whether he is leaving Bastia or not, and Dubovsky, who played in only three of the 11 full internationals last season. Both will be vital to the team in the Euro 2000 qualifying games.

Group 7 is not as strong as the Slovaks' World Cup group, and perhaps a second-place finish behind Romania or Portugal is not beyond the realms of possibility.

Vencel seems to be having a new lease of life in goal, and Kinder will be available for the important games.

There is time for Jankech, reappointed for the length of the Euro 2000 campaign, to experiment, though there is a lack of suitable opposition available.

Bob Vaughan

IN SLOVENIA...

New coach Bojan Prasnikar is determined that Slovenia will amass more than 10 times as many points in the qualifying games for Euro 2000 as they did in the World Cup.

Their only success in the preliminaries for France was a 3-3 draw with Croatia in Split, so Prasnikar is setting his team a target of at least 11 points.

He is team coach for the second time, having been in charge 1991-93, but will continue with his club, FC Maribor, until the end of this season.

Prasnikar, contracted until the end of Euro 2000, was the obvious choice to replace Zdenko Verdenik, who would have gone after the World Cup disasters even if his contract had not expired.

Zdravko Reic

IN MACEDONIA...

The list to date reads: Bulgaria, Poland, Russia, Bosnia, Bosnia again, and a tournament in the United Arab Emirates.

These are the friendly matches already planned as Macedonia concentrate on making a good show in the Euro 2000 qualifiers. They will face Croatia, Malta, Yugoslavia and the Republic of Ireland.

The FA are to ask for financial help to build more seats at the City Stadium in Skopje, which has only 14,000 despite being Macedonia's biggest sports arena.

The season restarts with Cup games on February 22, followed by the League's resumption on March 1. Sileks lead by four points from Skopje and eight from Vardar.

Vardar manager Darko Pancev was sacked but reinstated 10 days later.

Michel Stojmanovski

Pro-file Andrei Tikhonov

Spartak hit-man seeks UEFA Cup solace

Club Moscow Spartak
Country Russia
Born October 16, 1970, in Kaliningrad
Previous clubs Vympel Kalingrad, Titan Reutovo
International debut February 1996, v Malta
International caps 10 (1 goal)
Honours Russian League 1993, 1994, 1996, 1997; Russian Cup 1994

NEED some goals on the big occasion? Then Moscow Spartak midfield ace Andrei Tikhonov is your man. He scored the goals which clinched the Russian League title for Spartak in 1993 and 1996, and was on target twice as the club progressed to the last eight of this season's UEFA Cup.

Tikhonov is not one to crawl into his shell when the competitive heat is at its fiercest. "I relish those important games," he says. "The crowds are bigger, the adrenalin flows and I step up my game as a result. I remember playing in the Spartak side which won every one of its Champions League group matches a couple of years ago and I enjoyed every minute.

"That's why it was so disappointing when we did not qualify for this season's Champions League and Russia were beaten by Italy in the World Cup play-offs. Missing those big events is so frustrating. A football career is short and it's your duty to cram as much into it as possible.

"I can't explain how we managed to lose to Kosice in the preliminary round of the Champions League this season. We should have won comfortably. Fortunately, we were then allowed to play in the UEFA Cup and everyone here is determined to set the record straight. By reaching the quarter-finals and beating a good German side like Karlsruhe on the way, we have shown the real face of Spartak."

Snapping up scoring chances has always formed the backbone of Tikhonov's play. As a teenager, he was a prolific striker for Vympel Kalingrad and Titan Reutovo and even after his move to Spartak in 1992, he continued to distinguish himself in attack – setting a goal-scoring record in 1993 with an eight-goal blitz for Spartak's reserve team in a Third Division game.

Yet despite such feats of finishing, his career as a front runner was soon to draw to an end. In 1995, Spartak boss Oleg Romantsev experimented by lining Tikhonov up on the left of midfield and the switch proved an instant success.

Tikhonov, now 27, would never rate among the swiftest of players, but thanks to his adhesive touch on the ball and astute passing, he was a creative revelation. Nor did the retreat to the midfield trenches quell his hunger for goals. In 1996, his hit-man instincts and precision shooting from free-kicks brought him 16 goals, including the winner in Spartak's championship play-off victory over Alania Vladikavkaz. He was the natural choice as Russian Footballer of the Year.

The only area where Tikhonov has been found wanting is in the physical department. Injury kept him out of Russia's Euro 96 squad, and last February he damaged a knee while with the national team in Hong Kong and was forced to sit out the next four months.

Now he is back in the international picture and after starring in Spartak's UEFA Cup run and 1997 domestic title, he is a top transfer target for a number of clubs, with Spain his most likely destination.

Nick Bidwell

SOUTH AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL RECORDS 1997

	P	W	D	L	F	A	%
Brazil	22	18	3	1	65	17	88.6
Argentina	14	7	5	2	17	9	67.9
Peru	16	9	2	5	18	22	62.5
Paraguay	15	7	2	6	17	16	53.3
Ecuador	17	6	5	6	23	23	50.0
Chile	16	7	2	7	33	20	50.0
Bolivia	13	6	1	6	19	17	50.0
Colombia	17	6	4	7	18	18	47.0
Uruguay	16	6	3	7	18	19	46.9
Venezuela	13	0	2	11	5	30	7.7

Brazil still the best

ARGENTINA won the South American World Cup qualifying group last year, but Brazil were still the continent's best team.

They won the South American Championship (against mostly below-strength opposition), and showed their class in friendlies and a couple of high-profile tournaments abroad, in spite of often missing leading players with foreign clubs.

Last year, with both World Cup qualifying and South American Championship games, activity was intense. The 10 South American countries played 100 internationals – mostly against each other – although often not fielding their strongest teams.

Of the 100 games, 44 were World Cup qualifiers and 25 were in the South American Championship.

Brazil played most games (22) and suffered only one defeat, 4-2 against Norway in Oslo. This came as a great surprise, but it was their only hiccup in a season which included victory in the Confederations Cup in Saudi Arabia.

The records seldom show the true ranking of the countries, and the final World Cup qualifying table – with all apart from holders Brazil playing each other home and away – gave a more accurate ranking, with Argentina finishing on top, followed by Colombia, Paraguay and Chile. But all of them behind were Brazil in terms of quality.

Eric Weil

IN BRIEF

RUBEN DA SILVA, the Uruguayan striker who was top scorer in Argentina's 1997-98 opening championship, was transferred by Rosario Central to Universidad Autonoma de Guadalajara (Mexico) for £1.2million. This means that the club will be able to pay salaries owing to the rest of their players.

WILLIAM MARTINEZ, the former Uruguayan defender, has died in Montevideo, aged 69. He played in the 1950 World Cup-winning team and the South American champions side of 1956.

BRAZIL

Back to front again

Championship starts with second stage as top clubs win exemption

Romario...returned home after his spell in Spain

BRAZILIAN football directors have done something different once again, this time by starting a competition with the second stage rather than the first. The new-look Carioca (Rio de Janeiro state) championship kicked off with a game between Vasco da Gama and Bangu which was brought forward from the sixth date of the championship's second stage. The first stage of the contest then got under way one week later.

Vasco and Bangu qualified automatically for stage two, along with Flamengo, Fluminense, Americano and Botafogo, thus enabling them to play their fixture. The first stage, in a new-look, streamlined competition, featured the smaller teams (Itaperuna, Olaria, America, Volta Redonda, Madureira and Friburgense), with the top two going into the second stage.

The change of date worked out well for Vasco (when the second stage comes around they will be playing in the marathon first round of the Libertadores Cup), but left Bangu with a seven-week wait for their next competitive match, when the second stage gets under way for real.

The big clubs were exempted from the first stage after Flamengo, Fluminense and Botafogo won their annual battle with the Rio federation and its despised president, Eduardo Viana, popularly and mysteriously known as 'Water Box'.

The year had begun in familiar style with the rebel three claiming they would boycott the first stage of the tournament if they were forced to take part, and 'Water Box' defying them and threatening all sorts of terrible sanctions.

The first stage is a financial disaster for the big clubs, forcing them to play endless matches against semi-professional outfits. Last year, they really did boycott the opening day but then backed down after obtaining a signed document from Viana promising to exempt them from the first stage in 1998. When 1998 came round, however, he claimed he knew nothing of the document, and the whole circus began again. Viana seems to enjoy criticism. The more stick he gets, the more defiant he becomes. He once gave an interview in which he claimed that he had gone back on a decision to stand down simply to annoy his detractors. This year, however, he promised to fight the rebels to the end. "Last year, I conciliated. This year, we will see who is stronger," he said.

So it was an enormous shock when Viana suddenly relented, one week before the competition had been due to get under way. So far, nobody knows what prompted his about-turn, and there is an uncomfortable feeling that he is still lurking around the corner, ready to wreak more havoc later in the competition.

The big clubs prefer to devote the start of the year to another competition, the Rio-Sao Paulo tournament, featuring Botafogo, Vasco, Fluminense and Flamengo from Rio, and Sao Paulo, Santos, Palmeiras and Corinthians from Sao Paulo. They feel this is more lucrative than the state championships, but when Vasco met Palmeiras in the tournament's opening game, only 887 people turned up to watch.

The Paulista championship was also reduced, with the big four exempt from the first stage. This all seemed rather harsh on Portuguesa, who reached the Brazilian championship final in 1996 and the last eight in 1997 but obviously are paying the penalty for not having enough political clout.

As usual, the close season brought a huge number of moves, with a surprising number of players returning from abroad after very short spells indeed. These included Paulo Nunes (back at Palmeiras after four months with Benfica), Luizao (who signed for Vasco after six months with Deportivo Coruna), Romario (returning to Flamengo from Valencia), Ze Roberto (Flamengo from Real Madrid), Palhina (Flamengo from Real Mallorca) and Paraguay's Carlos Gamarra (Corinthians from Benfica).

Portuguesa's Rodrigo was bought by Real Madrid but then moved straight to Flamengo on loan without even setting foot in Spain. We were treated to the odd sight of him waving a Real shirt while saying how happy he was to be joining Flamengo.

Vasco signed (occasional) international forward Donizete to partner Luizao in attack and replace the Edmundo-Evair partnership which inspired the club's successful assault on last year's Brazilian championship. Edmundo has departed for Fiorentina and Evair to Portuguesa.

Botafogo provided the latest stop on Bebeto's worldwide tour (since June 1996 he has played for Deportivo Coruna, Sevilla, Vitoria, Cruzeiro and Botafogo), while Tulio, their cheeky and prolific goalscorer, returned after a year's absence during which he played for Corinthians and Vitoria.

Palmeiras manager Luis Felipe Scolari got nought out of 10 for imagination as he attempted to regroup his old Gremio pals at his new club. In addition to Paulo Nunes, key striker during Scolari's days at Gremio, Palmeiras also signed Paraguayan full-back Francisco Arce and midfielder Arilson. All three were part of the infamous Gremio side who hacked their way to the Libertadores title in 1995, under Scolari.

The managerial merry-go-round continued at full speed in the close season, with Vanderley Luxemburgo moving from Santos to Corinthians, former Brazil goalkeeper Emerson Leao from Atletico Mineiro to Santos, Brazil's 1990 World Cup manager Sebastiao Lazaroni to Gremio, and Eduardo Amorim to Portuguesa to step in for Carlos Alberto Silva, who replaced Leao at Atletico Mineiro.

The stormiest change was at Botafogo, where Carlos Alberto Torres discovered he had been replaced when he heard Gilson Nunes giving a radio interview confirming that he had been appointed manager. "They're all bad characters," said Torres. "All these people are dishonest. That's the way it is. But I wish Nunes all the best, even though he's unethical."

Brian Homewood

Loan star...Marco Etcheverry

ECUADOR

Bonus rule helps Barcelona triumph

BARCELONA from Guayaquil won the Ecuador title on goal difference from Deportivo Quito after finishing level on points in the six-team final round.

Barca had taken three bonus points into the final round (obtained during the season's first two tournaments) against Deportivo's one, and they also were helped by the loan of internationals Marco Etcheverry (Bolivia) and Antony De Avila (Colombia) from US clubs during their close season.

Deportivo entered the last game with a three-point lead and needed only a draw for the title, but they were beaten 3-0 by Barcelona, who finished 21-18 ahead on goal difference. Defending champions El Nacional finished fifth.

COLOMBIA

All together at the season's start

CALI's traditional rivals, America and Deportivo, champions in 1997 and 1996 respectively, started the Colombian championship with a 2-2 draw.

Another four of the eight games ended in draws and were decided by penalties – a system adopted for the second year running, with an extra point going to the shoot-out winner.

America, unable to reach agreement with Luis Garcia, have a new coach, Diego Umana, who was with Millonarios. They, in turn, have replaced Umana with former national team coach Francisco Maturana, his first acquisition being Ecuador midfielder Jimmy Blandon.

Deportivo have sold internationals Miguel Calero, Hamilton Ricard, Edison Mafla and Walter Escobar.

Nacional acquired Calero to replace Rene Huigita, who moved to Mexico's Veracruz last season. Escobar has also gone to Nacional, whose veteran international Alexis Garcia has retired.

Eric Weil

Club Focus Penarol

Eric Weil on Uruguay's six-in-a-row title hopefuls

CLUB ATLETICO PENAROL are going for the record this year – a sixth Uruguayan championship in succession. The club won the title between 1958 and 1962 and have done so in each of the past five years. Their great rivals Nacional first set the five-in-a-row feat from 1939 to 1943, but no side has ever won the title in six successive seasons since professional soccer became official in Uruguay in 1932.

Penarol did not win either the opening or closing championship last season – these titles went to Nacional and Defensor – but they were helped by a rule which allows the club taking most points during the season without winning either tournament to compete in the playoff with the two winners.

And it was Nacional, of all clubs, who helped Penarol to finish with most points by beating Defensor in the last game of the regular season.

This, without doubt, was Penarol's most difficult title of the five. With five games to go in the closing championship, they were left with only a mathematical chance. They had to win their remaining games, while also relying on other results to go their way – which they did. They then won playoff games against Nacional and Defensor (twice) to finish with eight wins in a row and clinch the title – bringing their total championship haul to 34, way ahead of Nacional in second place with 24.

Penarol went on to win the end of season eight-team playoffs for Libertadores Cup places, qualifying for the tournament for the 30th time – another record.

But although they have won the Libertadores Cup five times (including the competition's first two years in 1960 and 1961), they are bettered by Argentina's Independiente, with seven victories, and Penarol have not won the Cup since 1987.

The club was formed when a group of 118 employees (English and Uruguayan) of the then British-owned Central Uruguay Railway founded the Central Uruguay Railway Cricket Club in 1881, and the first president was Englishman Frank Hudson.

The railway's central office was in the Montevideo suburb of Penarol, so the club soon became known by that name. They played their first soccer match the following year against British Schools Montevideo and won 2-0. Since then, success has rarely left them. In 1900, Penarol and three other clubs formed the Uruguayan FA and played the first championship, which Penarol won. They retained the title the following year, but then Nacional won it twice to start a great rivalry which continues to the present day, with their clashes always setting a generally poor championship alight.

Penarol's nickname – "Carboneros" (coal shovelers) – comes from their early connection with the railway but they also are called "Mirasoles" (sunflowers) because of their traditional black and yellow colours.

Club president Jose Pedro Damiani was elected in 1987, and returned in 1993 when the club had not won the title for seven years – their longest barren stretch. They were in a financial mess, but Damiani, a book-keeper by trade, managed to fix their financial problems. Success on the field came almost immediately afterwards – and has not stopped yet.

But Damiani, 76, is philosophical. "When we win, they say to me 'Old man, don't ever leave us.' But when we lose, they want to turn over my car. So I always leave the stadium just before the end, because although I used to be a boxer I can't even box a round today."

Damiani's idol is international midfielder Pablo Bengoechea, called "Professor" because of his on-field tactical skills. He is 32 and has been captain of all five title-winning teams.

Three other players have also been involved in all five titles – defenders Jose de los Santos, 39, Robert Lima, 25, and Nelson Olveira, 33. Another player, striker Antonio Pacheco, 21, has played in the last four triumphs.

Penarol, who have won the Intercontinental Cup three times (1961, 1966, 1982), also have several promising younger players on their books, and are keen to keep them, despite often having to sell players abroad in order to survive.

When you ask Damiani about the future, and a possible sixth straight title this year, he gets angry.

"What do you expect? The others also play with 11 men on the field. One day you've got to lose," he says.

Penarol's professor...Bengoechea

GOALKEEPERS

Fernando Henry Alvez	38
Claudio Sebastian Flores	21
Luis Alejandro De Agustini	21

DEFENDERS

Oscar Aguirregaray	37
Daniel Ignacio Borjas	23
Jose Enrique De Los Santos	29
Jorge Miguel Goncalvez	28
Robert Lima	25
Edgardo Alberto Adinolfi	23
Serafin Fabricio Garcia	22

MIDFIELDERS

Gonzalo De Los Santos	21
Ramon Dario Larrosa	26
Clever Marcelo Romero	21
Nicolas Ezequiel Rotundo	21
Ruben Fabian Pereira	30
Marcelo De Suza	23

FORWARDS

Luis Alberto Romero	29
Marcelo Danubio Zalayeta	19
Antonio Pacheco	21
Juan Carlos De Lima	25

MEN TO WATCH

Nelson Artigas OLVEIRA
Aged 33. Defender who played in all five championship-winning teams, and has continued to improve throughout this period.

Pablo Javier BENGOECHEA
Aged 32. Another five-title winner, as well as winning the Copa America with Paraguay in 1995. The team's key player and playmaker, with outstanding experience, technique and leadership. Free-kick specialist.

Carlos Alberto AGUILERA
Aged 34. Won one Uruguayan title, plus Copa America in 1983 with Uruguay. Also played for Genoa and is known for his technique and goals.

Mixed response to two new contests

Integration is the name of the game, writes Eric Weil

NEW CLUB tournaments this year should strengthen the link between CONMEBOL (the South American Soccer Confederation) and CONCACAF (covering Central and North America and the Caribbean), and there are even those who talk about the two confederations eventually joining up.

Two CONCACAF countries have played as guests in the past three editions of the Copa America, the South American Championship between nations, and now club competitions are being integrated.

Two new competitions, the Mercosur and Merconorte Cups, loosely based on two common trading areas, bring in clubs from the US and Mexico, while the traditional Libertadores Cup, played between the two top teams of all 10 South American countries, is including two from Mexico for the first time.

The two clubs, who will start off in a preliminary round, should have been Cruz Azul and Guadalajara, the current winter and summer champions, but the Televisa TV concern managed to push in two clubs they own – America and Atlante – to play a qualifying tournament between the four. Eventually Televisa withdrew Atlante, while Cruz Azul dropped out due to fixture congestion. So Guadalajara and America, the country's two most popular clubs, will play against Venezuela's top two, FC Caracas and Atletico Zulia, to decide who goes through to the competition proper.

Venezuela's clubs, which usually lose money in the tournament and are generally the weakest of those taking part, will receive financial compensation – £130,000 each plus travelling expenses – while the Venezuelan FA will receive £53,000 and TV rights calculated at £260,000.

The 39th edition of the Libertadores Cup, now sponsored by Toyota, is starting on February 25, with teams in five groups of four playing each other home and away. The bottom club in each group will be eliminated. The 15 remaining teams plus the holders, Cruzeiro of Brazil, qualify for the knockout (home and away) stage, with the second round scheduled for April 15 and 29 and the quarter-finals for May 6 and 25. The semi-finals (July 16 and 22) and Final (August 12 and 26) fall after the World Cup.

The new Mercosur Cup, due to start on March 6, is a TV-orientated tournament (surprise!) for which 20 of the area's most popular clubs have been invited to participate. They will be divided into groups of five, playing each other home and away, with the winning side going into two-legged semi-finals.

The clubs invited are Flamengo, Vasco da Gama, Palmeiras, Corinthians, Sao Paulo, Gremio and Cruzeiro from Brazil, River Plate, Boca Juniors, Independiente, Racing Club, San Lorenzo and Velez Sarsfield from Argentina, Olimpia and Cerro Porteno from Paraguay, Colo Colo, Universidad Catolica and Universidad de Chile from Chile, and Penarol and Nacional from Uruguay.

Ten of these clubs will be engaged in the Libertadores Cup at the same time, while also playing in their domestic championships. International calls prior to the World Cup will weaken their squads even further.

The Merconorte Cup is for 16 teams (as yet undecided) with three from each of Ecuador, Colombia, Peru and Mexico, two from the USA and one from both Venezuela and Bolivia.

The CONMEBOL Cup – the South American equivalent of the UEFA Cup – is scheduled to take place after the World Cup and is still in doubt, while the Super Cup, for past Libertadores Cup winners, has been shelved this year due to fixture congestion. Argentinian and Brazilian clubs had signalled their intention not to take part this year, which would have left only seven teams.

Although Paraguay's government promised full backing for the 1999 South American Championship to go ahead in their country, the FA asked for a further extension to confirm whether Paraguay can stage the event. If it cannot, one alternative would be to stage it in three countries – Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil, or Argentina, Colombia and Mexico.

Cup holders...Cruzeiro are current Libertadores champions

Paraguay not only has to enlarge or build stadiums, because only one is in good enough condition – the Paz del Chaco in Asuncion – to host games for such a tournament, but hotel capacity and communications must be improved, too.

These prerequisites are particularly important because CONMEBOL president Nicolas Leoz is talking of making it a special tournament as it coincides with the end of the century. Apart from inviting two CONCACAF countries, as has been done on the past three occasions, countries from other continents would be invited; Spain, Portugal, Japan and South Korea have been mentioned.

Two cups would be contested – the traditional Copa America and the Copa Amistad (Friendship Cup). A possible non-South American winner would take the latter, with the Copa America going to the best-placed South American team.

● *For the Libertadores Cup draw, see World Service, starting on page 55.*

Cuba cause USA some problems

AFTER a gap of almost half a century the USA finally played Cuba again, and contrary to some media hysterics, there were no political ramifications, no signs of protest, no signs of defection.

The game, played in front of a meagre 11,234 crowd in Oakland, opened the CONCACAF Gold Cup – a tournament that each year holds less and less interest to the Central American countries and is looked upon by Mexico merely as training practice for the World Cup.

This hasn't always been the case, but Jack Warner, the man who moved the CONCACAF offices to New York, believes that dollars are more important than fans in Central America, so he has staged this tournament in the USA, sometimes combining it with the Aztec Stadium in Mexico City, where he can get 100,000 crowds.

The last time the USA faced Cuba was in Mexico City in 1949, during the second and last North American Soccer Championship, which also served to produce the two qualifiers for the 1950 World Cup.

The Americans won 5-2 then; this time round, their 3-0 victory was booed and raised serious doubts about their ability to field a competitive team for the World Cup.

For almost an hour the modest Cuban team, playing without any defensive system in place, prevented the USA from scoring.

When the US team finally found the way to break open the naive Cuban backline, they scored three goals in 21 minutes – and missed at least four other chances.

Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador have shown little interest in the outcome of this Gold Cup, believing that Brazil, Mexico and the USA are being helped to progress in the tournament by being allocated favourable venues. Even so, the winning or best-placed CONCACAF team will be invited to compete in the Copa America in Paraguay.

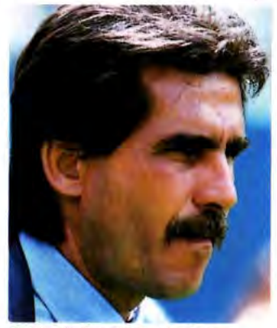
● There is likely to be a photo finish to qualify for the play-offs in the Mexican top division. This is because there are not many minnows left any more and the inconsistent results show that most of the teams are of a similar quality.

After six rounds of the 17-match series, only Tecos UAG, a team from Guadalajara and managed by Victor Manuel Vucetich, remain undefeated. Vucetich won three League titles and one Cup between 1991 and 1994.

Four managers already have lost their jobs: Carlos Miloc (Tigres UNL), Uruguayan Julio Cesar Gonzalez (Puebla), Anibal Ruiz (Leon) and Manuel Manzo (Toros Neza).

Gonzalez has been replaced by former international Raul Cardenas, who has spent the past few years at the Mexican Federation's referees' training school.

Carlos F Ramirez



Waiting in the wings...Queiroz

Promise-breaker...Parreira

A tale of Carlos and Carlos

Back in 1995, the United States Soccer Federation got itself into a comically embarrassing mess when it fired national team coach Bora Milutinovic – without having lined up his replacement. Time began to run out, with US Cup 95 approaching and the national team coachless.

Loud pronouncements from the USSF let it be known that Portugal's Carlos Queiroz, then coaching Sporting Lisbon, was about to sign. At the last moment, Queiroz decided to stay in Portugal. More much-too-public negotiating followed, this time with Brazil's Carlos Alberto Parreira, just fired by Valencia.

More disappointment. Parreira joined Turkish club Fenerbahce instead. With no more time, the USSF appointed Steve Sampson as interim coach. He is still there.

But Carlos and Carlos continue to haunt the American scene. Things didn't work out for Queiroz at Sporting, and in the summer of 1996 he was coaching in the USA. Not the national team, but the hapless MetroStars. When the season ended – MetroStars were knocked out in the first round of the playoffs – Queiroz packed his bags and headed for Japan to coach Nagoya Grampus Eight.

He was replaced at MetroStars by, you guessed it, Carlos Alberto Parreira, who didn't have a good year. This time, MetroStars didn't even make the playoffs and nobody was wildly excited at their dull play. But Parreira had a two-year contract.

In a meeting with the players in November, he told them not to listen to rumours that he was leaving. He would be their coach in 1998. A month later, Parreira walked out, telling MetroStars that he had been hired to coach Saudi Arabia in the World Cup.

So 1998 opened without a Carlos in sight, but not for long. In January came the news that Carlos Queiroz – no longer coaching Nagoya – had been hired as a technical consultant to compile a study of current youth development programmes in the US.

That was the official line, but many saw the arrival of Queiroz as the beginning of the end for Sampson. Not surprisingly, Sampson himself was not overjoyed, but the USSF said it had all been smoothed over at a meeting between Sampson and Queiroz "because we need a coach who isn't looking over his shoulder every five minutes."

Sampson knows all about job insecurity. Even after he had qualified the team for France 98, his confirmation as US coach for the finals was delayed for three weeks.

Now, it is widely expected that Sampson will swiftly be replaced by Queiroz as soon as the team are knocked out of the World Cup finals.

MLS: third time lucky for MetroStars?

You have to feel sorry for MetroStars. They are arguably the worst team in the MLS, but at least they had the prospect of a 1998 season guided by the experienced Carlos Alberto Parreira.

When Parreira simply walked away (see above), the MetroStars were suddenly seeking a coach for the third time in their two-year history – and opted for Spanish-born Alfonso Mondelo, who was already on the the MetroStars staff, having been hired a few weeks earlier as an assistant coach.

The new-look MetroStars, says Mondelo, will be "blue collar and hard-working". They will also have to find replacements for their foreign stars Roberto Donadoni (Italy), Antony De Avila (Colombia), and Shaun Bartlett (South Africa), none of whom is returning. So far, the only newcomer is Ariel Palacios, a defender from Colombia.

Elsewhere, Kansas City Wizards have acquired former Everton player Paul Rideout, who played in China last year. "He can definitely do the job" said coach Ron Newman, even though 33-year-old Englishmen aren't big draws in the MLS.

Sweden's 38-year-old Thomas Ravelli will play for Tampa Bay Mutiny, who have traded their main man – Colombian midfielder Carlos Valderrama – to the other Florida club, Miami Fusion. Lothar Osiander, formerly the head coach of Los Angeles Galaxy, is joining as assistant to head coach John Kowalski.

Yet another goalkeeper move: Jorge Campos, acrobatic darling of Los Angeles Galaxy's many Mexican-American fans, has moved on to Chicago Fire.

Paul Gardner

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Hong Kong hustle...Nigeria held on win the Carlsberg Cup

Bora starts with some silver

Brian Langley sees Nigeria win in Hong Kong

NIGERIA won the Carlsberg Cup in Hong Kong as part of the build-up to the World Cup finals. The major surprise of the two-day, four-game event was Chile's poor placing – fourth out of four, a depressing opening to their planned series of warm-up matches. Hong Kong finished runners-up, and Iran took third place.

New coaches Bora Milutinovic (Nigeria) and Tomislav Ivic (Iran) were meeting their players for the first time, and were without their European-based players, although six of the Nigerian Olympic gold medal winners from 1996 were in action.

Kingsley Obiekulu of Dutch team Go Ahead Eagles and fellow defender Babalade Ajibade of Korea's Lucky Gold Star were outstanding in the tournament, as was Jero Sapkira from Italian side Reggiana.

Nigeria beat Iran in the first semi-final with a goal by their captain, Samson Siasia. In the other match, the Hong Kong Selection defeated Chile 3-1, Australian Paul Foster completing a hat-trick in the last minute.

Chile, who had scored in the sixth minute of the game, did so again in the match to decide third and fourth places, but Iran soon equalised and were well worth their draw after 90 minutes. They then won the penalty shoot-out, with their captain, Abedzadeh, saving two kicks and scoring himself from the last.

This was a particularly good performance by Iran, considering that Ali Daei, Karim Bagheri and Khodadad Azizi, such free scorers in the World Cup qualifiers, had not been released by their German club sides.

Nigeria took a long time to get on top in the final against a team composed entirely of expatriates living in Hong Kong, but the Super Eagles won comfortably in the end with goals from Siasia and Patrick Pascal.

Attendances over the two days of competition totalled almost 53,000.

JAPAN

Ooft hits Purple patch

DUTCHMAN Hans Ooft, the former Japan national team boss, is leading a determined effort to keep Kyoto Purple Sanga in the top flight when the J.League splits into two divisions next year.

Ooft, who is on a one-year contract with the sole task of keeping Kyoto up, promises attractive football, and has 12 new players to help make it happen.

His biggest signing is the 32-year-old Brazilian midfielder Paulo Silas, who played in the 1986 and 1990 World Cups. Silas, who has Serie A experience with Sampdoria and Milan, has signed a one-year contract.

Kyoto's other new boys include Hisashi Kurosaki from Kashima Antlers, Takahiro Yamada from Yokohama Marinos, and Hajime Moriyasu from Sanfrecce Hiroshima, a team which appears to have run out of money.

As well as Moriyasu, Sanfrecce Hiroshima have shed three other past or present national team stars: Ryuji Michiki to Yokohama Marinos, Takuya Takagi to Verdy Kawasaki and Hiroshige Yanagimoto, who is still looking for a new home. In a similar vein, Vissel Kobe have dismissed 19 players.

Nagoya Grampus Eight, meanwhile, have acquired midfielder Bernard Allou, 22, from Paris SG and Yokohama Flugels have signed the Brazilian Anderson, 20, from Nova Iguacu.

The influx of players from South Korea also continues. The latest arrival is attacking midfielder Kim Dae Eui at JEF United Ichihara, while Cerezo Osaka, who have two Koreans, have signed Yugoslavian forward Rdivoje Manic from Korean club Daewoo Royals.

Jubilo Iwata, who started last season under Felipe but won the championship under a Japanese caretaker manager, Takashi Kuwabara, have returned to Brazil for a new boss – former manager of Kuwait, Valmir Louruz, who was at Pelotas in Rio Grande Do Sul last year.

Other managerial moves include the appointment of Nicanor at deeply troubled Verdy Kawasaki and Urawa Reds' appointment of former Japan national team striker Kiromi Hara, who replaces Horst Koppel.

● KASHIMA ANTLERS made quick amends for their slip in the J.League championship play-off against Jubilo Iwata by storming to victory in the Emperor's Cup, the equivalent to the FA Cup.

● GAS, the top club in the capital (Tokyo has no J.League team), finished second in the 1997 JFL, edging Kawasaki Frontale out of a promotion spot.

Mike Plastow & Michi Ishijima

OCEANIA

Clarkson catches up

SYDNEY UNITED continue to set the pace in the Ericsson Cup – but South Melbourne, the most dogged of the chasing group, are only three points behind and now have the look of genuine title contenders.

Diminutive linkman Dave Clarkson, 29, can take much of the credit for turning things around for Australian soccer's great under-achievers. Clarkson, whose CV includes a stint with Brighton, won a long battle to regain match fitness after undergoing knee surgery in 1996.

Adelaide City, Carlton Blues, Perth Glory and Melbourne Knights occupy the other places in the top six.

● IN NEW ZEALAND, Napier City Rovers completed the first half of the season undefeated, but ever-improving North Shore United have moved into second place, seven points behind.

● IN SAMOA, the Cup Final ended in chaos when a Vaivase-Tai player refused to leave the pitch after being shown the red card. Kiwi, who led 3-2, were later awarded the match and the trophy.

● PLAYERS from England's Premier League occupied three of the top four positions in the 1997 Oceania Footballer of the Year awards. Aston Villa goalkeeper Mark Bosnich was a convincing winner, gaining 35 votes more than the joint runners-up, West Ham United's Stan Lazaridis and New Caledonian Christian Karembeu of Real Madrid. Robbie Slater of Southampton finished fourth in the poll.

Paul Moon

IN BRIEF

Air Force finish first

THAI AIR FORCE snatched the **THAILAND** title on the final day of the season. Sinthana, who needed only a draw to complete the double of League and Cup, lost 2-0 to Bangkok Bank and missed the title on goal difference. Sinthana's Seksan Pitara was Player of the Season, and Pea Pong Pue-on of Air Force won the award for top coach.

In **BANGLADESH**, the five-team championship play-off will be contested by Mohammedan SC, Muktijoddah, Abahani, Brothers Union and Farashganj.

In the **UAE**, the poor standard of the game has led to a major change. For the first time in 17 years, foreign-born players are now eligible to sign for local clubs.

In **HONG KONG**, the first 11 rounds ended with Instant-Dict on 28 points, five ahead of Sing Tao and Happy Valley.

In **SAUDI ARABIA**, Al Hilal, who are already 10 points clear of the rest, look dead certs to take the title again.

In **SYRIA**, Al Karama are blazing a trail with 34 points from 13 games – the season's halfway point.

In **OMAN**, Al Nassr topped the table with 21 points from eight games.

In **QATAR**, an opening burst of five wins and a draw put Al Ittihad five points clear.

In **KUWAIT**, Kazma have begun with four victories, to lead by three points.

In **IRAQ**, Zawara led after 15 games, with 36 points to 35 by Talaba.

Azam Mahmood & Mohammed Chbaro

Dalian miss the record

DALIAN won the title in **CHINA** for the third time in four years, but their campaign ended on an unhappy note. After going 55 games without defeat, they lost 4-2 to Shanghai in their final match, losing the chance to beat Milan's 58-game world record.

Guangong and Tianjin were relegated, but two extra teams will be taken in next season, so Wuhan, Shenzen, Songri and Shenyang all go up. Meanwhile, Bejing became the first club to win the Cup in successive years, beating Shanghai 2-1 in the final.

The FA is to give lifetime suspensions for any referee found guilty of arranging match results – a huge cause of complaint in China.

Zheng Ming

Coach hits trouble

In **INDIA**, Mohun Bagan and coaches do not seem to go together at present.Last year, Amal Dutta was dismissed from the club after he was found guilty of arranging a match result. Now his replacement, T K Chathunny, has been ordered to stay away from the club.

Chathunny left Salgaocar of Goa to join Mohun Bagan, but a court has ruled that he broke his contract, and must not make contact until the issue is resolved.

Champions JCT Mills began the defence of their title with a 3-0 victory over Churchill Brothers, following it with a 0-0 draw against East Bengal.

G C Das & Bhasi Malaparamba

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AFRICA

COSAFA CASTLE CUP

Crash! That's South Africa falling at the first

AFRICAN champions and World Cup finalists South Africa suffered a surprise away defeat in Namibia to go crashing out at the first hurdle of the COSAFA Castle Cup, the regional tournament for the 10 members of the Confederation of Southern Africa Football Associations.

South Africa, playing their first game since the resignation of coach Clive Barker, were beaten by an extra-time golden goal, from Berlin Auchumeb, after being forced into extra time by a last-minute equaliser.

The reshuffled South African team, with many experienced campaigners dropped and captain Lucas Radebe injured, overshadowed their opponents and led twice through Thabo Mooki and Phil Masinga, only to allow a very game home team to fight back and equalise.

Namibia, who were runners-up last year, now advance to the final round group competition, which kicks off in late March. They will meet defending champions Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and either Swaziland or Angola.

The final group will be decided on a League basis, with each country playing the other only once. A draw to decide whether matches are played home or away will be made in Swaziland after their deciding match with Angola on March 7.

Zambia kicked off the second edition of the tournament with a 1-0 away win over Malawi in a tough contest in Blantyre. Veteran Kenneth Malitoli, restored to a striking role, got the goal seven minutes before half-time with a shot that cannoned off both uprights before trickling in.

Zimbabwe overcame Lesotho 2-0 despite being under pressure for almost the entire first half, while Mozambique were trailing Botswana 1-0 until the last eight minutes, when the Mambas staged a fight back and scored twice through Tico-Tico and teenage striker Avelino.

Mark Gleeson

ROUND-UP

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Moloto quits Bucks

In **SOUTH AFRICA**, Mamelodi Sundowns have had their lead in the Premier League cut to four points after being beaten 2-0 by arch-rivals Kaizer Chiefs. Umtata Bucks are second but have lost coach Trott Moloto to the South African national team, with whom he will be assistant coach.

In **ZAMBIA**, new national coach Burkhard Ziese backed down on his threat to leave captain Kalusha Bwalya out of the squad for the African Nations Cup finals. Ziese wanted Bwalya to join the team's training camp 14 days before the start of the tournament in Burkina Faso but Bwalya insisted on staying with Mexican team Leon until the end of the first stage of the championship. Ziese then left Bwalya out of his plans, only to change his mind under pressure from Zambian officials.

Jonson Bwalya, no relation, has apologised to the coach after indiscipline ahead of the game against Nigeria last December. Bwalya was late for a team meeting and was dropped.

Zambian champions Power Dynamos have signed newly capped international midfielder Rotson Kilambe and Under-20 international Stanley Mumba ahead of their African Champions League campaign.

In **ZIMBABWE**, champions Dynamos have signed three Zambians – Nicholas Kasongo, Joshua Sakala and Crispin Simwanza – in time for their games in Africa's top club competition.

CENTRAL AFRICA

In **CAMEROON**, Union Sportive Douala won the Cameroonian Cup with a 2-1 defeat of neighbours Port FC in Yaounde. Ngole and Oum scored for the winners in a drab match.

EAST AFRICA

The draw for this year's East and Central African Senior Challenge Cup in **RWANDA** is: Group A – Rwanda B, Burundi and Ethiopia; Group B – Kenya, Sudan and Tanzania Mainland; Group C – Rwanda, Uganda and Zanzibar; Group D – Rwanda C, Eritrea and Djibouti. The tournament will be held from November 16 to December 2.

The next club championships in the region will be held in Uganda between January 2 and 16, 1999.

In **KENYA**, Musa Otieno, who plays for relegation-threatened Santos in South Africa, was named as Footballer of the Year for 1997.

NORTH AFRICA

In **TUNISIA**, Esperance lead Club Africain by two points in another tight race. Defending champions Etoile Sahel are nine points off the leaders.

In **EGYPT**, Al Ahli are well on their way to a successful defence of their title with a four-point lead over Ismaili as the halfway mark approaches. Traditional rivals Zamalek, who have signed Sudanese international Hayssam Al-Zeini, are back in fifth place.

Austrian coach Joseph Berger has replaced Michael Kruger at Cairo's other club, Arab Contractors. Kruger has gone to Al Masry.

Former Egyptian national team coach Farouk Gaafar has taken up a post with Second Division Gomhouriya Chebine.

Al Ahli's Hady Khashaba was named as Egypt's Footballer of the Year for 1997 ahead of team-mate Mohamed Emara. Khashaba also won it in 1995.

Kawkab Marrakesh, close to relegation last season, lead the **MOROCCAN** championship at the halfway mark, eight points ahead of African champions Raja Casablanca.

In **ALGERIA**, Billel Dziri was named Footballer of the Year for 1997, to add to the award he won in 1995. The midfielder, who has just signed for Tunisian club Etoile Sahel, finished ahead of Mounir Zeghoud in the voting.

WEST AFRICA

In **GHANA**, Dawu Youngsters and Dwarfs are the leaders, with 13 points from the opening six matches.

Mark Gleeson

Pro-file Eric Addo

Ghana's new star is also big in Belgium

Club Brugge (Bel)
Country Ghana
Born November 12, 1978, in Accra

IN BELGIUM, Eric Addo has had such a devastating season and made such a positive impression that they wanted to naturalise him and make him available for the World Cup in France.

But the teenaged Ghanaian has decided to go with the country of his birth and has quickly won an international career for himself – in the African Nations Cup finals.

Ghana's Black Stars were quick to contact him after news of his decision to forgo the Belgian offer had come through, and coach Rinus Israel drafted him into the Nations Cup squad for the tournament in Burkina Faso.

Addo, whose father played for his country, has been with Brugge from the age of 16 and had never turned out for any of the Ghanaian representative teams. This made him eligible for Belgium, who regard foreign footballers under the age of 18 as Belgians and have a quick-track naturalisation process.

They must be rueing Addo's decision to play for Ghana because he is the new sensation of African soccer, having burst through the ranks in Belgium with a club who are comfortably on the march to yet another championship.

"He is a completely free-flowing footballer," says Brugge coach Eric Gerets, a former world-class defender with a long pedigree of success. "Obviously there is still work to do on his positional sense and vision. But he will work all of that out sooner rather than later. He is an absolute talent and always so eager to learn. Within two years he'll be world class."

Addo, the eldest of three children, went to Belgium on the recommendation of compatriot William Berkoe, who plays for Second Division neighbours Cercle Brugge.

Cercle use the same ground as Club Brugge and had the first look at the player. However, they turned him down, saying that Addo had not even made the grade with a leading club back in Ghana and, by rights, would find it difficult in Belgium.

Instead he joined the juniors at Club Brugge, who paid only the price of his air ticket from Accra for him. He had a few games last season, but his career has really taken off in the past few months.

Mark Gleeson

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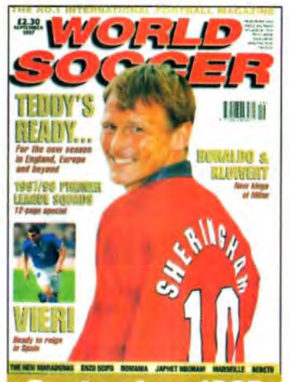

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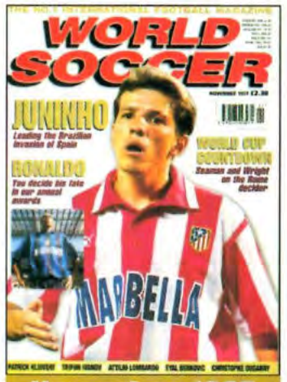

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Crossword

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Mitre have kindly donated an Ultimax, the official match ball of the English Football Association, as first prize for this month's crossword. The first correct entry selected at random after March 2 will win the ball. Five runners-up will each win an exclusive *WORLD SOCCER* sweatshirt.
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CLUES ACROSS
1 .....Former Sampdoria striker of Parma and Italy (6)
3 .....Bochum's Polish-born midfielder first capped by Vogts in 1997 (4)
7 .....Nigerian forward who switched last summer from Rostock to Stuttgart (9)
9 .....Former Feyenoord coach now in charge at Anderlecht (4)
10 .....Feyenoord's recently-retired ex-Barcelona and Holland defender (6)
12 .....Australian international striker in Europe with Feyenoord and Sion (6)
13 .....Club side from Anjalankoski – Finland's cup winners in 1992 and 1995 (4)
16 .....One-time Cannes defender who moved from Bordeaux to Chelsea (9)
17 .....Macedonian keeper with Korea's Daewoo Royals and Germany's Hamburg (4)
18 .....Guinea forward based in France with Lens and now Marseille (6)

CLUES DOWN
1 ..... US Major League club from San Jose (5)
2 .....Anatoly Konkov's successor as Ukraine's national coach (4)
4 .....Georgian appointed Tanzania's national coach in 1996 (9)
5 .....Roma's Czech coach formerly in charge at Lazio (5)
6 .....Coach replaced by Gerets at Club Brugge (5)
8 .....Ex-Atalanta coach who launched Lecce's latest tilt at Serie A (9)
11 ....._____ Sanchez, 24-year-old midfielder with Real Madrid (5)
12 .....Atletico's multi-million pound recruit from Juve (5)
14 .....Amsterdam _____ name originally given to Ajax's new stadium (5)
15 .....Italian forward who joined Vialli and Di Matteo in Ruud Gullit's squad (4)

FEBRUARY SOLUTION
Across: 7 Apoel, 8 Miami, 9 Vosvelt, 10 Foe, 11 Lula, 13 Arce, 17 Job, 18 Arendse, 20 Santi, 21 Lille
Down: 1 Babbel, 2 Moss, 3 Elber, 4 Smith, 5 Gaafar*, 6 Wise, 12 Lobont, 14, Ekeren, 15 Sakic, 16 Kelly, 17 Jose, 19 Doll
* Or Jaafar

FEBRUARY WINNERS
1st Prize: William Aitkenhead, Grangemouth, Stirlingshire.
Runners-up: Garry Roach, Erdington, Birmingham; Walter Rossen, Deurne, Belgium; Paul O'Mahony, Cork, Ireland; D. Collingwood, Herts; Dan Cullen, Carlisle, Cumbria.

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Diary January 1998

THURSDAY, JANUARY 1, 1998

ARGENTINA: Diego Maradona's manager Guillermo Coppola says talks are well advanced for him to join a takeover bid for his former club Napoli.
JAPAN: Kashima Antlers beat Yokohama Flugels 3-0 to win the Emperor's Cup.
SWITZERLAND: UEFA says Borussia Dortmund captain Stefan Reuter will be suspended for the first leg of the European Supercup against Barcelona after receiving a second yellow card against Sparta Praha in the Champions League.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 2

ENGLAND: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger denies suggestions that there is a drink problem at the club.
GERMANY: Bayern president Franz Beckenbauer says he is certain Germany will reach the World Cup Final in July.
IRAN: Veteran German coach Udo Lattek is said to have been offered the job of coaching Iran at the World Cup finals.
SPAIN: Mallorca's Brazilian striker Palhinha is set to return home to Flamengo – while Flamengo's Junior Baiano is being linked with a move to Barcelona after the World Cup.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 3

NIGERIA: Thousands of fans turn out in Lagos for the wedding of national team midfielder Jay Jay Okocha.
SOUTH AFRICA: Philippe Troussier, sacked after guiding Nigeria to the World Cup finals and currently boss of African Nations hosts Burkina Faso, is appointed new manager of South Africa, and will take up his duties after the African finals.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 4

ACTION: Manchester United beat holders Chelsea 5-3 in the FA Cup third round…in Italy, Inter hand Juventus their first league defeat of the season to open a four-point lead at the top…in Spain, Real Sociedad go third after beating Mallorca 1-0.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich pay the £3,000 fine imposed on general manager Uli Hoeness for criticising referee Hellmut Krug after the 2-2 derby draw with neighbours 1860 in November.
SPAIN: Zaragoza fine Argentina stars Gustavo Lopez and Kily Gonzalez £4,200 each for returning too late from their Christmas holidays to play against Bilbao.
SWITZERLAND: Gilbert Gress, coach of relegation-threatened Neuchatel Xamax, is poised to be named new national coach.

MONDAY, JANUARY 5

AUSTRIA: The OFB is told that Andy Hunt, 27-year-old leading scorer with West Bromwich Albion of the English First Division, can play for Austria in the World Cup because of his Austrian grandmother.
BRAZIL: Vasco da Gama sign striker Luizao from Deportivo La Coruna of Spain to replace Fiorentina-bound Edmundo.
FRANCE: Bordeaux are considering an investment from the ENIC group which has bought shareholdings in Rangers and Vicenza…Rennes bid to bring goalkeeper Bernard Lama back to France from West Ham.
NORWAY: National manager Egil Olsen tells Chelsea goalkeeper Frode Grodas that his best chance of playing in the World Cup finals in France this summer is to move from Stamford Bridge.
SINGAPORE: FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter tells a football business convention that the game must beware exploitation and commercial abuse.
SPAIN: Ottmar Hitzfeld of Borussia Dortmund is tipped to succeed Bobby Robson this summer as Barcelona's scouting director…Merida's Russian striker Dmitri Radchenko is ruled out for four months with a broken toe.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6

BELGIUM: Excelsior Mouscron protest to the EC at UEFA's refusal to permit them to play a UEFA Cup tie against Metz in a larger stadium across the French border in Lille.
ENGLAND: Barnsley's Macedonia striker Georgi Hristov attacks local people in an interview with a Belgrade magazine.
FRANCE: Basile Boli, whose goal won Marseille the Champions Cup in 1993, is forced to retire because of a head injury he suffered two years ago…tenors Jose Carreras, Placido Domingo and Luciano Pavarotti will complete a hat-trick of World Cup appearances when they sing in Paris on July 10, two days before the final.
GERMANY: 1860 Munich sign Australia defender Ned Zelic from Auxerre and former Werder Bremen striker Bernd Hobsch from Rennes.
PORTUGAL: Benfica striker Joao Pinto is said to have suffered a fractured jaw during a scuffle during Monday's defeat by FC Porto.
SINGAPORE: At the Football Expo, Franz Beckenbauer suggests Germany and England should consider a joint bid to host the 2006 World Cup…French officials say perimeter fences at all 10 stadia will be removed in time for this year's finals; Michel Platini says the competition has reached its limit at 32 nations.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7

ACTION: African Nations hosts Burkina Faso beat Mozambique 4-2 in a friendly.
BELGIUM: Karel van Miert, European commissioner for competition, warns FIFA that its system of licensing agents could contravene European Union law.
FRANCE: Bottom club Cannes sign Algeria forward Kamei Kaci-Said from Egyptian champions Zamalek.
GERMANY: Ottmar Hitzfeld says he is to resign as Borussia Dortmund's director of sport because he wants to return to coaching…Leverkusen defender Christian Worns agrees to join Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season.

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Suspended…Vincent Guerin

ITALY: Inter release midfielder Nicola Berti to join Tottenham.
NORWAY: Norway arrange two World Cup training camps in England because of their many British-based players.
SINGAPORE: At Football Expo, Asian officials say TV will have a big say in kick-off times at the 2002 World Cup but games will not start at midnight in order to satisfy European audiences.
SPAIN: France midfielder Christian Karembeu formally completes his transfer from Sampdoria to Real Madrid.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8

ACTION: A goal by Luis Enrique and a Rivaldo penalty bring Barcelona a 2-0 home victory in the European Supercup first leg against Borussia Dortmund.
ARGENTINA: Boca Juniors sign Colombia midfielder Mauricio Serna.
BRAZIL: Bebeto signs a one-year contract with Botafogo. His transfer from Vitoria Bahia via Cruzeiro is arranged by the Excel bank which owns Bebeto's contract.
CZECH REPUBLIC: Jozef Chovanec is appointed new national coach in succession to UAE-bound Dusan Uhrin.
FRANCE: Vincent Guerin (PSG), Antoine Sibierski (Auxerre) and Dominique Arribage (Toulouse) are banned for 18 months, with 12 months suspended, for testing positive for the banned anabolic steroid nandrolone…Marseille coach Rolland Courbis says the club have turned down a Milan bid for Fabrizio Ravanelli. The Italian outfit want him as a stop-gap substitute for the injured George Weah.
GERMANY: Udo Lattek turns down an offer to coach Iran at the World Cup finals.
HUNGARY: Ferencvaros fear that striker Igor Nichenko has failed to report back after a trip home because he may have been conscripted into the Ukraine army.
PORTUGAL: Benfica sources say they cannot pay Manchester United any of the £2million fee for Czech Republic star Karel Poborsky until after the club is floated on the Lisbon stock exchange.
UNITED STATES: New club Miami Fusion is assigned Argentine veteran Marcelo 'Popeye' Herrera from Velez Sarsfield.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 9

ENGLAND: FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter, in a BBC radio interview, suggests it is time to take the World Cup to Africa.
FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain say they are shocked by the suspension of midfielder Vincent Guerin for a doping offence…Strasbourg sign South Korea's World Cup forward Won Jung-seo, capped 75 times, from LG Cheetahs.
GERMANY: Dutch veteran Gerald Vanenburg agrees to join 1860 Munich at the end of the season from Cannes…Karlsruhe sign veteran defender Guido Buchwald from Urawa Red Diamonds…leaders Kaiserslautern sign Hungary defender Janos Hrutka from Ferencvaros.
PORTUGAL: Porto defender Paulinho Santos, accused of breaking Benfica captain Joao Pinto's jaw last weekend, is banned until the striker is fit again.
SPAIN: Brazilian striker Rodrigo Fabri signs his five-and-a-half year contract with Real Madrid, though he will not play for them until the 1999-2000 season.
SWITZERLAND: FIFA says Mexico captain Claudio Suarez will not be punished after an allegedly positive dope test at the Confederations Cup because of "an administrative error".
YUGOSLAVIA: Red Star Belgrade sign Brazilian striker Guilherme Guida Silveira from Villanova of Belo Horizonte on a six-month contract.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10

ACTION: Zambia beat Malawi 1-0 in a Cosafa Castle Cup first round match…the French League resumes with champions Monaco losing 1-0 at home to Cannes.
GERMANY: Karlsruhe sign France forward David Zitelli from Strasbourg.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 11

ACTION: Roberto Baggio makes his 300th appearance in Italy's Serie A in a 0-0 draw between Bologna and Empoli…in Spain, leaders Barcelona throw away a two-goal lead in the closing minutes for the second time in six days and only draw 2-2 with Real Sociedad.
NORWAY: Rosenborg sell captain Bent Skammelsrud to Bayer Leverkusen.

Sold…Bent Skammelsrud

SWITZERLAND: FIFA consider using a coloured disc instead of a coin to aid TV coverage of the toss-up at the World Cup.

MONDAY, JANUARY 12

ARGENTINA: Diego Maradona claims that many Argentine league matches are fixed.
AUSTRALIA: Australia goalkeeper Mark Bosnich of Aston Villa is voted Oceania Footballer of the Year.
FRANCE: Inter's Brazilian striker Ronaldo is voted FIFA Footballer of the Year for the second successive time.
URUGUAY: The mass exodus of players continues unabated with a survey in El Obervador claiming that Uruguayans are even playing in China and Guatemala. In all, 77 Uruguayan players have been sold abroad during the past year.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13

ENGLAND: Norway coach Egil Olsen, leading a World Cup training camp at Blackburn, says he believes his team can beat Brazil in the World Cup finals.
FRANCE: Transport minister Jean-Claude Gayssot warns of traffic chaos at the World Cup unless fans use public transport to reach Paris's new Stade de France…Cannes sign Austria defender Walter Kogler from SV Salzburg.
GERMANY: Borussia Monchengladbach midfielder Stefan Effenberg turns down a move to Tottenham.
ISRAEL: Striker Ronnen Harazi returns home from Salamanca to play for Hapoel Haifa on loan for the rest of the season.
NIGERIA: Nigeria says it needs only a modest 1,900 tickets for each of their three World Cup first round matches.
SPAIN: Christian Karembeu's long-awaited debut is spoiled as Second Division Alaves beat Real Madrid reserves 1-0 in the Spanish Cup fourth round.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14

ACTION: In African Nations warm-ups, Ghana and Mozambique draw 0-0 and Morocco beat Angola 2-1 in a game where boxing legend Muhammed Ali is introduced to the players.
BELGIUM: The EC says it has no plans to crack down on alcohol advertising as it has on tobacco advertising.
BULGARIA: International defender Radostin Kishishev returns home to Litex Lovech from Turkish club Bursaspor.
ENGLAND: Liverpool's US keeper Brad Friedel may be transferred as his prospects of retaining a work permit are reduced by his failure to break into the team…Former England coach Terry Venables is disqualified by the High Court from holding company directorships for seven years.
FRANCE: Sheffield Wednesday defender Patrick Blondeau joins Bordeaux for £1.2million after his wife become homesick in England…law officers say they plan high-speed justice for soccer hooligans at the World Cup finals.
GERMANY: Hertha Berlin complete the signing of Andreas Thom from Celtic.
ITALY: Inter sign Uruguayan defender Martin Rivas…Ronaldo is reported to be planning to marry girlfriend Suzana Werner after the World Cup.
SPAIN: Santander take out an unusual insurance policy – against relegation.
SWITZERLAND: FIFA orders Atletico Madrid to pay Juventus outstanding fees on the transfer of Christian Vieri by February 12 or face a possible ban from European competition.
UNITED STATES: New York MetroStars appoint Alfonso Mondelo from Long Island Rough Riders as new head coach.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15

AUSTRIA: The federation says that West Bromwich striker Andy Hunt does not qualify for selection because he does not hold an Austrian passport.
CHINA: Twelve top clubs admit having offered bribes to referees.
ENGLAND: Manchester City complete the long-delayed signing of Georgia defender Kahaber Tskhadadze…struggling Crystal Palace sign French defender Valerien Ismael from Strasbourg for a club record £1.8million and agree to keep Sweden's Tomas Brolin until the end of the season …Manchester United deny reports of a £50million sponsorship deal with Ford.
FRANCE: Monaco sign midfielder Ludovic Giuly from Lyon for £4million.
IRAN: Tomislav Ivic is appointed national team coach for the World Cup finals.
ITALY: Parma buy Faustino Asprilla back from Newcastle United.
POLAND: Legia Warsaw borrow striker Cezary Kucharski from Gijon in Spain for the rest of the season.
PORTUGAL: Porto's Poland striker Grzegorz Mielcarski, just back after a two-year injury lay-off, is ruled out for another two months after injuring a shoulder in the 5-4 domestic cup victory over Second Division Maia…Benfica agree terms to buy English forward Brian Deane from First Division Sheffield United.

OBITUARIES

NODAR AKHALKATSI, president of Georgia's federation, has died aged 60, of a suspected heart attack.

GEORGE MARKS, former England goalkeeper, has died aged 82. Marks once commanded a goalkeeper's world record transfer fee of £5,000 when he joined Blackburn Rovers from Arsenal in 1946.

SLAVA METREVELI, star right winger for the Soviet Union, has died in Tbilisi aged 61. He helped Moscow Torpedo win the Soviet league and cup double in 1960 before leading Tbilisi Dynamo to their first Soviet league title in 1964.

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SCOTLAND: Dundee United look to Africa, taking Cameroon midfielder Jean-Jacques Misse Misse until the end of the season and the Nigerian midfielder Chinedu Anazonwu on trial.
SWITZERLAND: FIFA rejects complaints from several countries about their World Cup ticket allocations.
UNITED STATES: TV networks ABC and ESPN sign up to screen all 32 matches of the 1999 Women's World Cup.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 16

ARGENTINA: Lazio target Marcello Salas says he will stay with River Plate until after the World Cup. He denies reports that he had agreed an eight-year contract with Lazio worth £1.3million a season.
BELGIUM: UEFA's Lennart Johansson issues a brochure of testimonials supporting his bid for FIFA president.
BRAZIL: Edmundo is recalled to Brazil's squad for the CONCACAF Gold Cup.
BULGARIA: CSKA sign veteran forward Emil Kostadinov on loan from Monterrey of Mexico until the end of the season.
BURKINA FASO: The African Nations hosts launch a vaccination campaign against meningitis in Ouagadougou and in Bobo Dioulasso, the two cities due to host the tournament. The health minister says the 10-day mass vaccination campaign is a precautionary measure.
ENGLAND: Bernard Lama, unable to find a French club to join, returns to West Ham.
FRANCE: Australia forward Aurelio Vidmar joins Chateauroux from Tenerife until the end of the season.
HOLLAND: PSV midfielder Phillip Cocu is off to Spain, agreeing to join Barcelona on a three-year contract.
ITALY: Inter's French midfielder Benoit Cauet fails in his appeal against a three-match ban for hitting Tacchinardi of Juventus...Gianni Rivera, old Milan favourite and now an MP, denies a report that he was considering running for FIFA president...veteran keeper Walter Zenga retires as a player in the United States to return to Inter as a marketing aide.
NORTHERN IRELAND: Northern Ireland agree a friendly against England's World Cup opponents Romania in Bucharest on May 30, but a proposed friendly against Colombia in Belfast on March 25 falls through because of the South American country's financial demands.
PARAGUAY: Paraguay confirms its intention of hosting the 1999 Copa America, for which two new stadia will be built, in Encarnacion and Citta dell'Este.
PORTUGAL: Barcelona forward Luis Figo is voted Sportsman of the Year for the third successive year. He polls 79 votes, nine more than Porto forward Mario Jardel...Benfica confirm their signing of Brian Deane from Sheffield United just in time to beat the domestic transfer deadline.
SOUTH AFRICA: Kaizer Chiefs pull out of the forthcoming African Cup-winners Cup because they would face a fixtures pile-up of 25 games in league and cups in the middle of May. Mamelodi Sundowns will take their place in the Cup-winners Cup.

Unsettled...Bodo Illgner

SPAIN: La Coruna protest to FIFA in their on-going dispute with Real Madrid over Brazilian midfielder Rodrigo Fabri...Bodo Illgner says he wants a transfer from Real Madrid after losing his first-team place...Atletico Madrid confirm that just before the midnight transfer deadline they signed Israel defender Avi Nimni from Maccabi Tel-Aviv for £1million – and that Paulo Futre had moved to Portuguesa of Brazil.
SWITZERLAND: Gilbert Gress is confirmed as new national team coach...FIFA says it will investigate reports that World Cup tickets are being offered at inflated prices on the Internet.
TURKEY: Aston Villa midfielder Sasa Curcic's proposed move to Besiktas breaks down – at least until the summer.
UNITED STATES: Rape and kidnapping charges filed against DC United players Raul Diaz Arce and Mario Gori are dismissed after the woman involved refuses to testify to a court in Ohio.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17

ACTION: England skipper Alan Shearer returns after a six-month injury absence to create Temuri Ketsbaia's winner for Newcastle against Bolton...Atletico Madrid's Spanish championship challenge is seriously upset by a 2-1 defeat at struggling Valladolid.
POLAND: More than 100 fans are hurt and 50 need hospital treatment after fighting between GKS and Gornik fans at an indoor match in Katowice.
PORTUGAL: Benfica president Joao Vale e Azevedo says Graeme Souness may be replaced as coach if the club do not qualify for next season's Champions League.
SPAIN: Barcelona coach Louis Van Gaal is reported to have been offered the job of Holland manager after the World Cup.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 18

ACTION: Christos Maladenis scores twice as AEK Athens beat PAOK Salonica 3-0 to regain the lead in the Greek title race...Inter's lead in Italy is cut to one point as they lose 1-0 at home to Bari.
BELGIUM: The draw is made in Ghent for the qualifying round groups of Euro 2000.
ENGLAND: Leicester City manager Martin O'Neill accuses USSF officials of going back on their word by calling up the club's goalkeeper, Kasey Keller, for the CONCACAF Gold Cup.
GERMANY: Germany captain Jurgen Klinsmann says he will end his national team career after the World Cup finals.
ITALY: Roberto Baggio walks out on Bologna after being relegated to substitute for the match against Juventus.

MONDAY, JANUARY 19

BELGIUM: Anderlecht deny reports that Tottenham are considering taking a majority stake in the club. General manager Michel Verschueren says that would be impossible because there are no shares...Brugge's teenage striker Eric Addo opts to become a Ghanaian international instead of requesting the available Belgian nationality.
CROATIA: Goce Sedloski's transfer to Sheffield Wednesday from Hajduk Split is called off because of a pelvic injury.
GERMANY: Hansa Rostock striker Oliver Neuville breaks his right leg playing in an indoor tournament and is ruled out for two months...Franz Beckenbauer says he regards England as the "dark horses" to win the World Cup.
RUSSIA: Russian and Ukrainian officials insist that the European Championship draw, which sets up the first meeting between the two ex-Soviet states, is a matter of only football concern. Russia coach Boris Ignatiev says: "I hope that politics will be left on the sidelines."
SLOVENIA: Bojan Prasnikar is appointed national coach until December 1999.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20

ARMENIA: The federation's shortlist for national coach includes Jean Djorkaeff, father of Youri, whose France side will face Armenia in the Euro 2000 qualifiers.
BELGIUM: RWD Molenbeek sack coach Daniel Renders after a run of seven defeats. Team captain Guy Vandersmissen is appointed as his successor.
ENGLAND: Yugoslavia striker Savo Milosevic is placed on the transfer list by Aston Villa after spitting at his own club's fans during a 5-0 defeat at Blackburn.
FRANCE: Aime Jacquet calls up 20-year-old striker David Trezeguet of Monaco for the World Cup warm-up against Spain which opens the Stade de France on January 28...the Interior Ministry says 6,000 police and several hundred soldiers will be deployed on World Cup security duty...Cannes sell winger Laurent Charvet to Chelsea for £900,000.
GERMANY: Schalke defender Olaf Thon says he will retire from the national team after the World Cup finals.
ITALY: Players and coaching unions back a call by deputy prime minister Walter Veltroni for a limit on the number of foreigners in Serie A...Bologna coach Renzo Ulivieri quits over the row with Roberto Baggio...George Weah could leave Milan at the end of the season after a squabble with team coach Fabio Capello over his back injury.
ROMANIA: The federation tells Anghel Iordanescu it must know whether he intends to stay on in the job after the World Cup because of the need to plan ahead for the Euro 2000 qualifiers.
SPAIN: Atletico Madrid are knocked out of the cup by Zaragoza...Barcelona say they expect Liverpool and England midfielder Steve McManaman to join them at the season's end for £12million.
SWITZERLAND: FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter responds angrily to a UEFA ultimatum over whether he intends to stand for FIFA president. Blatter said: "It is mystifying that an organisation which preaches democracy, unity and fair play could launch such a personal attack."

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21

ACTION: Albania beat Turkey 4-1 in an international friendly.
BELGIUM: The European Commission warns Germany to stop a proposed law which would purport to exclude professional sport from EU trade rules.
BRAZIL: Romario is recalled for Brazil's games in the CONCACAF Gold Cup.
CHINA: Internationals Zhang Enhua and Fan Zihyi are invited to England by Southampton for a trial.
FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain striker Patrice Loko escapes further punishment at a Paris court for running amok and insulting police officers three years ago. He had already been fined a provisional £6,000 at the time for the incident.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich striker Ruggiero Rizzitelli says he intends to return to Italy at the season's end.
HOLLAND: Ajax coach Morten Olsen says Holland do not have the ruthless streak necessary to win the World Cup.
ITALY: Bologna coach Renzo Ulivieri withdraws his offer of resignation after talks with the club and Roberto Baggio.
SPAIN: Real Madrid are knocked out of the Cup by Second Division leaders Alaves...Barcelona midfielder Josep Guardiola is ruled out for a further month after injuring a hamstring 18 minutes into Monday night's 4-3 defeat by Valencia...Real Madrid apply for government permission to replace the Santiago Bernabeu stadium with a new 120,000-seat ground on the city's outskirts.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22

BRAZIL: Rodrigo of Flamengo – the subject of a transfer tug of war between Real Madrid and La Coruna – is ruled out for two months after injuring a vertebra in a collision with an opponent during a Brazilian Cup game against Operario in Campo Grande...in Rio, Bebeto makes his Botafogo debut in a 1-0 win over his former club, Flamengo. The game is played in front of only 8,000 fans.
ENGLAND: Legendary Nottingham Forest manager Brian Clough is charged with misconduct by the FA for allegedly accepting unauthorised payments when arranging player transfers.

Unavailable...Samuel Kuffour

FRANCE: The Interior Ministry announces that fences will remain at the World Cup stadia in Lens and Saint-Etienne.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich refuse to allow Ghanaian defender Samuel Kuffour to join his national team for the African Nations Cup two weeks before the tournament, as Ghana requested.
GUATEMALA: Police say 72 fans were injured the previous night after rioting broke out in the Mateo Flores stadium during and after Comunicaciones' 3-0 victory over arch rivals Municipal.
SWITZERLAND: UEFA fines Anderlecht and Twente £16,000 each for crowd-control problems at recent UEFA Cup games. Croatia Zagreb are also fined for fan clashes with police at a tie against Atletico Madrid. Sparta Praha coach Jozef Chovanec is suspended for one match for his conduct during the Champions League game on December 10 against holders Borussia Dortmund.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 23

ENGLAND: A study published in the medical journal The Lancet says that referees' and their assistants' eyes cannot keep pace with the feet of a soccer player and may be unable to udge whether he is offside.
ITALY: Sampdoria sell London-born Daniele Dichio back home to Sunderland for £750,000...Milan say they plan to float on the Milan stock market in 2000 and in London the following year.
SWITZERLAND: Winterthur Insurance denies reports that it is planning to help fund the transfer of Ronaldo back from Internazionale to Barcelona.
UNITED STATES: Tony Meola returns to the US national team duty after spells as a gridiron placekicker and an actor.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 24

ACTION: Namibia beat South Africa 3-2 in a Cosafa Castle Cup tie...the United States beat Sweden 1-0 in Orlando...Belgian leaders Brugge score a late equaliser in a 2-2 draw against Westerlo to preserve their unbeaten record.
FRANCE: Carlo Molinari, president of league leaders Metz, says he will not sign any more African players after more than 20 are revealed to have been called away for the forthcoming Nations Cup.
SPAIN: Real Madrid's cup defeat by Alaves in midweek prompts controversy over the players' reported late nights out.
YUGOSLAVIA: Red Star midfielder Zoran Njegus agrees to join Juventus at the season's end. Club-mate Nikola Lazetic completes details for a move to Feyenoord.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25

ACTION: The Kings Cup opens in Bangkok with hosts Thailand being held 1-1 by Egypt. Denmark beat South Korea 2-1.
SPAIN: Atletico Madrid forward Kiko Narvaez says he will be out for at least a month after damaging ankle ligaments against Bilbao...Paulo Futre changes his mind about quitting Atletico Madrid for Brazil's Portuguesa or Santos.

MONDAY, JANUARY 26

BRAZIL: Pele says he will stand aside temporarily as sports minister so he can take up his various commercial contracts – including that of television analyst – at the World Cup finals.
HOLLAND: Milan forward Patrick Kluivert makes a court statement in Amsterdam in a preliminary hearing of allegations that he and three friends raped a woman last May. He denies the charge.
ITALY: Milan deny they are trying to sell Patrick Kluivert...Internazionale agree terms with Portugal midfield star Paulo Sousa, bringing him to Serie A from European champions Borussia Dortmund.
JAMAICA: Jamaica lifts its two-year athletic boycott on Nigeria so the national team can meet in a friendly, to be played in Kingston on February 22.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27

ACTION: In the Kings Cup in Bangkok, South Korea beat Egypt 2- 0 while the hosts defeat Denmark 1-0.
CHINA: Nottingham Forest assistant manager Bobby Houghton is appointed coach of the Chinese national team.
ENGLAND: Newcastle sign Sweden striker Andreas Andersson from Milan for £3million...Tottenham suffer a serious blow when fitness expert Fritz Schmid is again refused a work permit.
GREECE: Representatives of Europe's top leagues discuss standardising players contracts and agreeing on a mid-season transfer window to help control the activities of players' agents.
SWITZERLAND: FIFA confirm that Savo Milosevic cannot walk away from Aston Villa on a free transfer in the summer because of the terms of a controversial transfer clause in his contract.
TURKEY: Galatasaray sign the Romanian league's leading scorer, Ionut Lutu, from Universitatea Craiova.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28

ACTION: In Paris, France beat Spain 1-0 in the inaugural match at the new Stade de France. Zidane scores the first goal in the much-criticised stadium.
BELGIUM: Swedish forward Per Zetterberg is voted Belgium's Player of the Year for the second time after a previous win in 1993. Zetterberg secures 243 points, four more than Franky Van der Elst.
BRAZIL: The Sao Paulo federation says it has not abandoned its bid to sign Bologna's unsettled Roberto Baggio.
ROMANIA: National coach Anghel Iordanescu says that, after the World Cup, he will take over the Greece national team.
UNITED STATES: MLS buys US goalkeeper Jurgen Sommer back from Queens Park Rangers.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

ACTION: In the Kings Cup in Bangkok, Egypt beat Denmark and South Korea beat hosts Thailand, both by a 2-0 margin.
AUSTRALIA: Ex-national coach Frank Arok says Soccer Australia should replace former England manager Terry Venables as national coach unless he moves to live in Australia.
AUSTRIA: Sheffield Wednesday pay £200,000 to take Tirol forward Christian Mayrleb on loan for the rest of the season.
ENGLAND: Norway goalkeeper Frode Grodas is sold by Chelsea to Tottenham.
GERMANY: Bert Vogts says he hopes to stay on as national coach after France 98.
SCOTLAND: Rangers say they will step up pressure on UEFA to switch the present Champions League format to a new set-up featuring six groups of six clubs.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

GREECE: PAOK Salonika sell midfielder Theo Zagorakis to Leicester for £750,000.
ITALY: Guillermo Coppola, after another meeting with the consortium bidding for Napoli, says Diego Maradona is prepared to return as coach, club official or even player to save them from relegation.
NIGERIA: Military leader General Sani Abacha is reported to have agreed to pay new national coach Bora Milutinovic £300,000 up front.
ROMANIA: National coach Anghel Iordanescu is told he will have to renounce his military rank of general if he takes over Greece after the World Cup.
SPAIN: Real Madrid defender Roberto Carlos predicts that Ronaldo will return to play in Spain next season.
SWITZERLAND: Coca-Cola signs an unprecedented World Cup sponsorship deal with FIFA to cover the 2002 and 2006 World Cups...UEFA agrees to set aside, for three years, its proposed ban on entry into the UEFA Cup of the English League Cup-winners.
UNITED STATES: The US prepare to warm up for the Gold Cup with a first international in 50 years against Cuba.

TRANSFER TRAIL

Barnard ALLOU	M	Paris St Germain	Nagoya Grampus Eight
Faustino ASPRILLA	F	Newcastle Utd	Parma
Nicola BERTI	M	Internazionale	Tottenham Hostpur
Patrick BLONDEAU	D	Sheffield Wed	Bordeaux
Tomas BROLIN	F	out of contract	Crystal Palace
Guido BUCHWALD	M	Uruwa Red Diamonds	Karlsruhe
Rodolfo CARDOSO	M	Hamburg	Boca Juniors*
Brian DEANE	F	Sheffield Utd	Benfica
EMERSON	M	Middlesbrough	Tenerife
Jan-Aage FJORTOFT	F	Sheffield Utd	Barnsley
Ludovic GIULY	M	Lyon	Monaco
Valerian ISMAEL	D	Strasbourg	Crystal Palace
Kamel KACI-SAID	F	Zamalek	Cannes
Radostin KISHISHEV	D	Bursaspor	Litex Lovech
Walter KOGLER	D	Austria Salzburg	Cannes
Anjian KOZNIKU	F	APOEL Nicosia	Bastia
Tobie MIMBOE	D	Cerro Porteno	Genclerbirligi
John MOSHOEU	M	Kocaelispor	Fenerbahce
Morten NIELSEN	M	FC Copenhagen	Strasbourg
Avi NIMNI	M	Maccabi Tel Aviv	Atletico Madrid
Gabi POPESCU	M	Univ. Craiova	Salamanca
William PRUNIER	D	Napoli	Hearts
Ermin SILJAK	F	Bastia	Servette
Bent SKAMMELSRUD	M	Rosenborg	Bayer Leverkusen
Mitko STOJKOVSKI	D	Oviedo	VfB Stuttgart
Andreas THOM	F	Celtic	Hertha Berlin
Michael THOMAS	M	Liverpool	Middlesbrough*
Stig TOFTING	M	OB Odense	Duisburg
Gerald VANENBURG	D	Cannes	Munich 1860
Aurelio VIDMAR	F	Tenerife	Chateauroux
WON Jung-Soo	F	LG Cheetahs	Strasbourg
Adalbert ZAFIROV	D	CSKA Sofia	Arminia Bielefeld
Ned ZELIC	M	Auxerre	Munich 1860
David ZITELLI	F	Strasbourg	Karlsruhe

loan deal

Making it count...Blackburn boss Roy Hodgson believes fitness coaching is integral to the modern game

Survival of the fittest

Kevin Palmer reports on the growing influence of fitness coaches

IT ISN'T often that the topic of fitness coaches dominates the back-page headlines, but one of the English Premiership's most famous clubs has been enduring a month of turmoil surrounding a new breed of foreign import who is now considered vital to players' well-being.

When Tottenham chairman Alan Sugar appointed Swiss coach Christian Gross as his new manager, Gross wanted to bring with him a fitness trainer he hoped would put an end to the damaging series of injuries that have crippled the north London club in the last couple of seasons. With the likes of England internationals Darren Anderton, Les Ferdinand and Ian Walker all painfully slow to return from the sidelines, Spurs are now threatened with relegation.

When it emerged that his chosen fitness trainer, Fritz Schmidt, Gross's Swiss compatriot and ally throughout his managerial career, was struggling to obtain a work permit, speculation grew that Gross would walk away from the task he describes as "the biggest of my life".

'Foreign coaches working in the Premiership have brought with them the more advanced continental fitness regimes'

But just how important is the fitness trainer to the back-room set-up at a modern club? The stories of the great Liverpool sides of the 1980s relying on untrained staff to tend players' injuries are well documented, yet foreign coaches working in the Premiership have brought with them the more advanced continental fitness regimes.

Ruud Gullit appointed former Great Britain athlete Ade Mafe as his fitness guru at Chelsea, while Blackburn Rovers manager Roy Hodgson has returned to his homeland with the continental methods picked up during his spells coaching Inter Milan and Switzerland.

"A top fitness coach is an essential part of any manager's set-up," confirms Hodgson. "You need a person whose full-time occupation is working with the players on their fitness. A medical man needs to get to know his patients. When they have a problem, he knows what is best for that specific case and what treatment is likely to work best with him as an individual.

"To have someone looking after the injuries that will inevitably come up allows the coach to devote his full attention to the coaching and tactical side of the game. A manager should not be sidetracked by things that can easily be delegated to others."

German captain and Tottenham striker Jurgen Klinsmann recently sent the likes of Anderton and Ferdinand to his own medical expert in Germany, the results being a quick return for some of the club's key players at a time when they need them most. Hardly a glowing endorsement of club physio Tony Lenaghan, who had failed to initiate their comebacks.

"We are involved in a relegation fight and if we can get players back one game quicker than it would normally take, it will make an enormous difference to us," confirmed Klinsmann.

Arsenal's French boss Arsene Wenger recently dispatched his skipper, Tony Adams, to the south of France to aid his recovery from a back injury, and Hodgson accepts that the winds of change are sweeping through English football.

"You have to say that Arsenal would certainly be better sending Tony Adams to the sun of France than the pier in Skegness where he might get blown away," jokes the Blackburn Rovers boss.

Hodgson continues: "The foreign players who come to England are always going to have medical people they trust in their homeland, and they might be able to give some advice to the English players. But by no means do all English clubs need to employ overseas fitness coaches which seems to be a bit of a trend these days. An Englishman could do the job just as well.

"I know FA Technical Director Howard Wilkinson is introducing some very useful improvements to the coaching courses available in this country and I'm sure that these will encompass fitness coaching. It is a vital part of the modern game."

Your chance to join the FA Coaches Association

FOR FA Technical Director Howard Wilkinson the launch of the FA Coaches Association is the first step in the implementation of his 'Charter for Quality' and an important chance to raise the profile of coaching in the UK. "Our goal is a better educated, informed and knowledgeable pool of football coaches," says Wilkinson.

The objectives of the new organisation are:

- to establish and maintain high ethical standards in coaching.
- to satisfy the desire for in-service training and continuing professional development (CPD) for those who have attended FA courses.
- to communicate with and develop communication among coaches.
- to improve and enhance the role of the 'coach' and the process of 'coaching'.
- to develop a register of qualified, disciplined and screened coaches.

THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

- An initial joining pack.
- Four issues of the FA Coaches Association journal *Insight*.
- Regional activities (UK members).
- Insurance protection (UK members).
- Exclusive education and training opportunities.
- CPD record.
- Coaching merchandise.
- Internet service.
- European Union of Football Coaches.

MEMBERSHIP COSTS

(12 months)
UK individual £35.
UK individual (if paid by direct debit) £29.50.
UK and overseas institutional £29.50.
Overseas individual £29.50.

HOW TO JOIN

For more information on how to join the FACA, phone **01707 651840**.

World Service

Your complete guide to the month's stats and facts

Opening shot...Fabian Barthez takes control for France against Spain in the Stade de France

INTERNATIONAL RESULTS

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Monday, December 22

Dec 22 - Cairo - intl friendly
Egypt 2 (Khashaba 44, Ali Maher 45)
Cameroon 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 30,000
Egypt: N Al-Sayed - Ah Hassan, Abdelhady (Al-Sagga 60), H Ramzy (S Kamouna 46), M Youssef, M Emara, Y Redwan, Khashaba, AS Sabry, Ali Maher (W Salaheddine 70), H Hassan.
Cameroon: Ongandzi - Njitap Fotso, Metomo, Foe, Etchi, Ipoua, Simo, Moreau, Olembe, Tchoutang, Job (Suffo 70).

Dec 22 - Cairo - intl friendly
Algeria 0
Togo 1
Att: 5,000

Wednesday, December 24

Dec 24 - Cairo - intl friendly
Egypt 1 (S Kamouna pen 85)
Algeria 2 (Adjali 5, Tasfaout 57)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 25,000
Egypt: Al-Hadary - Ah Hassan, S Kamouna, Hani Ramzy, M Youssef (Ali Maher 59), M Emara, Y Redwan, Khashaba (Abdelhady 59), A S Sabry (W Salaheddine 81), Enam Hazem, H Hassan.
Algeria: Benabdallah - Benamara, Abdekatif, Habri Ghoul, Harcheche, Dziri, Adjali (Zouani 74), Benzerga (Salimi 88), Ali Dahleb (Loukiki 60), Tasfaout.

Dec 24 - Cairo - intl friendly
Cameroon 3 (Simo 48, 70, Job 87)
Togo 1 (Salou 25)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 4,000

Saturday, December 27

Dec 27 - Bobo Dioulasso - intl friendly
Burkina Faso 2 (K Ouedraogo 10, Abd Traore 90)
Ivory Coast 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 5,000

Saturday, January 3

Jan 3 - Blantyre - intl friendly
Malawi 1 (Mangondwe 70)
Zimbabwe 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 6,000

Sunday, January 4

Jan 4 - Bobo Dioulasso - intl friendly
Burkina Faso 1 (A Ouedraogo 34)
Mozambique 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 4,000

Wednesday, January 7

Jan 7 - Ougadougou - friendly
Burkina Faso 4 (Ismael Koudou 55, 64, Lassane Ouedraogo 76, Brahima Traore 82)
Mozambique 2 (Enrico John 83, Bernardo Koumbe 88)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 12,000

Saturday, January 10

Jan 10 - Blantyre - Cosafa Castle Cup
Malawi 0
Zambia 1 (Kenneth Malitoli 39)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 40,000

Sunday, January 11

Jan 11 - Ougadougou - intl friendly
Burkina Faso 0
Mali 0 Att: 7,000

Jan 11 - Loma - intl friendly
Togo 1 (Noutsoudje 24)
Mozambique 2 (Bucuane 51, 74)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 2,000

Wednesday, January 14

Jan 14 - Accra - intl friendly
Ghana 0
Mozambique 0 Att: 10,000

Jan 14 - Casablanca - intl friendly
Morocco 2 (Mustapha Hadji 51, Abderrahim Ouakili 58)
Angola 1 (Youssef Rossi og 35)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 80,000
Morocco: Brazi (Asmar 46) - El Hadrioui, Rossi, Naybet, Saber, Azzouzi (Mghoghi 46), Chiba (Amzine 60), Chip (Bendhiba 76), Ouakili, Hadji, El Khattabi (Raghib 76).
Angola: Nando - Neto, Luis Miguel, Carlos Pedro, Paulo Silva (Zito 70), Sousa (Raul 54), Lito, Aurelio, Paulao (Lazaro 76), Quinzinho, Akwa.

Friday, January 16

Jan 16 - Banjul - intl friendly
Gambia 0
Zambia 2 (Moses Sichong 13, Andrew Tembo 65)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 5,000

Sunday, January 18

Jan 18 - Maseru - Cosafa Castle Cup
Lesotho 0
Zimbabwe 2 (Nkonjera 47, Ntsonyane og 55)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 12,000

Monday, January 19

Jan 20 - Accra - intl friendly
Ghana 3 (Gargo 64, Kuffour 70, Akunnor 75)
Mozambique 1 (Tico Tico 72)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 35,000
Ghana: S Addo - Edusei, Owuso Ansah, Bastios, Nyako, Gargo, O Kuffour, Tetteh, Akunnor, Afori Quaye, R Ackon.
Mozambique: Luis Dias - Faife, S Macamo, Clodoaldo, Inguane, Trigo, Pinto Barros, A Macamo, Vulande, Nana, Tico Tico.

Wednesday, January 21

Jan 21 - Ankara - intl friendly
Turkey 1 (Oktay Derelioglu 71)
Albania 4 (Altin Rraklli 14, 64, Alban Bushi 67, Mahir Halili 88)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Georginov (Bul)
Turkey: Rustu (Volkan 75) - Fatih (Tolunay 74), Selim (Tayfun 74), Alpay, Ogun, Tayfur, Oguz, Abdullah, Arif (Oktay 54), Sukur (Saffet 83), Hami (Tekke 78).
Albania: Strakosha (Belaj 69) - R Vata, Fakaj (Lala 46), Daiu (Kotri 35), Tole, Shulku (Haxhi 63), Kola, Rraklli (Bogdani 77), Bushi (Mema 74), Tare, Mahir Halili.

Saturday, January 24

Jan 24 - Windhoek - Cosafa Castle Cup 1st rnd
Namibia 3 (Goagoseb 44, Tjihero 90, Auchomab 101)
South Africa 2 (Mooki 42, Masinga 67)
HT: 1-1. **90min:** 2-2. **Att:** 20,000
Namibia win on golden goal
Namibia: Kanalelo - Gairiseb, Goagoseb, Tjihero, Nauseb, Ouseb, Mannetti, Uutoni, Goraseb (Hindjou 58), Uri Khob (Auchumab 64), Shivute.
S Africa: Baloyi - Rabutla, Nyathi, Jackson, Fish, Moeti, Silent, Mooki (Lebese 61), Augustine (Ngobe 54), P Masinga (Ndlanya 82), McCarthy.

Jan 24 - Orlando - intl friendly
United States 1 (Wegerle 2)
Sweden 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 12,773. **Ref:** Grady (US)
US: Friedel - Burns, Berhalter, Pope, Agoos, Stewart, Harkes, Reyna, Jones (Wynalda 46), Moore (Lassiter 64), Wegerle (Preki 64).
Sweden: Kihlstedt - Morgan Nilsson, Jacobsson, Mjallby, Lucic, Bergh (Lantz 76), Erlingmark, Ljungberg (Daniel Andersson 76), Osmanovski, Wahlstedt (Lilienberg 76), Jonsson (Mattiasson 86).

Sunday, January 25

Jan 25 - Bangkok - Kings Cup
Thailand 1 (Dusit Chalermsarn 25)
Egypt 1 (Ahmed Salah-Eddine 89)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 10,000

Jan 25 - Bangkok - Kings Cup
South Korea 1 (Shin Byoung-Ho 86)
Denmark 2 (Soren Andersen 13, Bisgaard 74)
HT: 0-1.

Jan 25 - Gaborone - Cosafa Castle Cup 1st rnd
Botswana 1 (Tshepiso Molwatnawa 78)
Mozambique 2 (Tico-Tico 82, Avelino 85)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 18,000

Tuesday, January 27

Jan 27 - Bangkok - Kings Cup
South Korea 2 (Choi Yong-soo 5, Lee Sang-yoon 43)
Egypt 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 15,000

Jan 27 - Bangkok - Kings Cup
Thailand 1 (Thawatchai Damrong-ongtrakul pen 40)
Denmark 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,000

Wednesday, January 28

Jan 28 - Garoua - intl friendly
Cameroon 1 (Song 25)
Angola 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,000

Boy wonder...Alessandro Del Piero takes on the Slovakian defence

Jan 28 - San Jose - intl friendly
Costa Rica 4 (Wright 5, Jewison Bennett 27, Guthrie pen 65, Wilmer Lopez 70)
Trinidad & Tobago 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 8,000

Jan 28 - San Salvador - intl friendly
El Salvador 1 (Castro 57)
Honduras 1 (Velasquez 7)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 12,000

Jan 28 - Catania - intl friendly
Italy 3 (Ravanelli 48, Del Piero 53, Di Matteo 63)
Slovakia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 26,919
Italy: Peruzzi - Ferrara, Maldini (Torricelli 64), D Baggio (Cois 55), Nesta, Costacurta, Di Livio (Moriero 46), Di Biagio, Di Matteo, Del Piero Chiesa 71), Ravanelli (Inzaghi 65).
Slovakia: Vencel (Seman 68) - Kozak (Dzurik 83), Spilar, Karhan, Timko, Tittel, Balis (Sovic 69), Kozlej (Ujlaky 51), Jancula (Luhovy 51), Dubovsky, Moravcik (Zvara 68).

Jan 28 - Hong Kong - Carlsberg Cup
Nigeria 1 (Garba Ahmad 50)
Iran 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 6,000

Jan 28 - Hong Kong - Carlsberg Cup – non-intl
Hong Kong League XI 3 (Foster 13, 35, 89)
Chile 1 (Barrera 5)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 20,000
Hong Kong XI: Guthrie - Kuhl, O'Shea, Kalkanov, Tempest, Foster, Grandelius, Wood, McKeown, Hunt, Clark.
Chile: Tapia - Reyes, Rojas, Margas, Galdames, Acuna, Sierra, Nunez, Cornejo, Valenzuela, Barrera.

Jan 28 - Tunis - intl friendly
Tunisia 0
Yugoslavia 3 (Branko Brnovic 5, Jokanovic 73, 78)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 15,000

Jan 28 - Paris - Stade de France inaugural match
France 1 (Zidane 20)
Spain 0
Att: 80,000
France: Barthez - Thuram, Blanc, Desailly, Boghossian - Ba (Pires 62), Deschamps (Candela 62), Zidane, Diomede - Djorkaeff (Leboeuf 90), Guivarc'h (Trezeguet 75).
Spain: Zubizarreta - Aguilera, Abelardo, Nadal, Alkorta - Amor (Fernando Sanchez 80), Luis Enrique, Sergi (Rios 60) - Raul (Pizzi 74), Exteberria (Lardin 53), Alfonso.

Thursday, January 29

Jan 29 - Kingston - intl friendly
Jamaica 0
Sweden 0
Att: 15,000
Jamaica: Barrett - Malcolm (Dawes 67), Dixon, Brown, Goodison, Gardner - Cargill (Messam 81), Simpson, Whitmore - Williams (Lowe 78), Hall.
Sweden: Svensson - Gustavsson, Osmanoski (Bergh 55), Matovac, Mjalliby - Morgan Nillson, Daniel Anderson, Lantz - Tjernstrom (Ljunberg 61), Lilienberg, Mattiasson (Johnsson 77).

Jan 29 - Bangkok - Kings Cup
Denmark 0
Egypt 2 (Hossam Hassan 47, Tur og 49)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 12,000

Jan 29 - Bangkok - Kings Cup
Thailand 0
South Korea 2 (Ko Jong-soo 52, Choi Yong-soo 63)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,000

EUROPE

BELGIUM

Saturday, January 17

Anderlecht 2 (Arst 55, Goor 89)
Antwerp 2 (Godfroid 5, Pivaljevic 73) Att: 19,758

Charleroi 1 (Brogno pen 6)
Genk 2 (Oulare 5, Strupar pen 55) Att: 4,000

Eendracht Aalst 3 (Meyssen pen 55, Lambo 68, Temmerman 78)
Beveren 0 Att: 5,800

Lokeren 4 (Van Geneugden 59, Janssens pen 81, Lisasi 85, Vonasek 86)
Lierse 2 (De Gier 7, Huistra pen 40) Att: 6,000

St Truiden 0 Westerlo 0 Att: 7,500

Sunday, January 18

Club Brugge 2 (Claessens 35, 44)
Gent 1 (Foguenne 49) Att: 14,000

Mouscron 3 (Tanghe 10, Seynhaeve 65, Van Dooren 83)
Standard 2 (Edmilson 5, Van der Doelen 85)
Att: 7,000

Lommel 0 Harelbeke 0 Att: 4,500

RWDM 0
Ekeren 4 (Radzinski 11, 86, Hofmans 38, 89) Att: 2,000

Friday, January 23

RWDM 2 (S. Laeremans 5, Miletic 62)
Anderlecht 2 (Doll 16, Petersen 36) Att: 7,000

Saturday, January 24

Antwerp 1 (Godfroid 3)
Eendracht Aalst 1 (Lassen 46) Att: 4,000

Genk 1 (Oulare 66)
Lokeren 0 Att: 9,100

Gent 0
Mouscron 0 Att: 6,000

Lierse 1 (Huistra 56)
Ekeren 1 (Radzinski 55) Att: 8,000

Standard 2 (Hellers 63, 79)
Charleroi 0 Att: 12,000

Westerlo 2 (Janssen 8, Brogno 74)
Club Brugge 2 (Vermant 5, Jankauskas 85)
Att: 10,000

Sunday, January 25

Beveren 2 (Simba 6, Dhont 26)
Lommel 2 (Cannaerts 25, 65) Att: 2,500

Harelbeke 3 (Origi 43, Zvingilas 47, 58)
St Truiden 1 (Morhaye 89) Att: 4,000

BELGIUM

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge	19	16	3	0	49	13	51
Genk	19	12	3	4	41	23	39
Harelbeke	19	9	8	2	36	20	35
Germinal	19	10	4	5	32	22	34
Lommel	19	8	5	6	31	26	29
Anderlecht	19	8	5	6	27	23	29
Lokeren	19	9	0	10	36	40	27
Lierse	19	7	5	7	31	27	26
Aalst	19	7	4	8	32	32	25
St Truiden	19	6	6	7	18	23	24
AA Gent	19	5	8	6	29	28	23
Charleroi	19	6	5	8	25	35	23
Standard	19	5	7	7	26	27	22
Westerlo	19	5	7	7	29	36	22
Mouscron	19	5	5	9	19	26	20
Beveren	19	3	6	10	19	33	15
Molenbeek	19	4	3	12	22	51	15
Antwerp	19	2	4	13	21	38	10

BELGIAN CUP

Jan 13: St Truiden 2 Anderlecht 1
Jan 14: Antwerp 2 Dendermeeuw 0; Club Brugge 6 Patro Eisden 0; Ekeren 2 Neeroeteren 0; Mechelen 1 Anderlecht 1; Standard 2 Beveren 1; Harelbeke 1 Mouscron 2 *(aet)*; **Genk 3 Lierse 1.**

BELGIAN CUP – QUARTER-FINAL

Germinal 5 Charleroi 0; Lierse 3 Genk 0.

CYPRUS

Jan 3: AEL 0 Eth.Assha 0; APOEL 5 Salamina 0; APOP 1 Anaghenisis 0; Alki 1 AEK 3; Anorthosis 0 Omonia 1; Enosis 1 Evaghoras 1; Eth.Achna 1 Apollon 1.
Jan 17: AEL 0 AEK 0; Alki 3 APOEL 3; Anaghenisis 0 Anorthosis 5; Eth.Assha 0 APOP 2; Evaghoras 1 Eth. Achna 2; Omonia 2 Apollon 2; Salamina 2 Enosis 3.

CYPRUS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anorthosis	14	10	2	2	45	7	32
Omonia	14	10	2	2	42	10	32
Eth.Achna	14	9	3	2	23	13	30
Apollon	14	8	5	1	28	13	29
AEK	14	7	5	2	28	17	26
APOEL	14	6	5	3	30	18	23
AEL	14	4	5	5	19	25	17
APOP	14	4	3	7	22	30	15
Salamina	14	5	0	9	21	36	15
Enosis	14	4	2	8	17	28	14
Evaghoras	14	2	5	7	13	27	11
Alki	14	3	2	9	19	40	11
Anaghenisis	14	2	4	8	15	37	10
Eth.Assha	14	1	3	10	12	33	6

ENGLAND

Sunday, December 28

Barnsley 1 (Ward 67)
Derby 0 Att: 18,686

Blackburn 2 (Gallacher 27, Sutton 78)
Crystal Palace 2 (Dyer 12, Warhurst 48) Att: 23,872

Coventry 3 (Whelan 12, Dublin pen 86, Huckerby 88)
Man Utd 2 (Solskjaer 30, Sheringham 47) Att: 23,054

Everton 3 (Ferguson 17, 41, 67)
Bolton 2 (Bergsson 42, Sellars 43) Att: 37,149

Leeds 1 (Hasselbaink 79)
Aston Villa 1 (Milosevic 85) Att: 36,287

Leicester 1 (Guppy 28)
Sheffield Wed 1 (Booth 85) Att: 20,800

Newcastle 1 (Watson 16)
Liverpool 2 (McManaman 31, 43) Att: 36,702

Southampton 1 (Davies 16)
Chelsea 0 Att: 15,231

Tottenham 1 (Nielsen 28)
Arsenal 1 (Parlour 62) Att: 29,610

Wimbledon 1 (Solbakken 90)
West Ham 2 (Kimble og 31, Kitson 54) Att: 22,087

Saturday, January 10

Arsenal 2 (Overmars 60, 72)
Leeds 1 (Hasselbaink 69) Att: 38,018

Aston Villa 1 (Joachim 87)
Leicester 1 (Parker pen 53) Att: 36,429

Bolton 0
Southampton 0 Att: 23,333

Chelsea 3 (Nicholls 65, 70, Di Matteo 78)
Coventry 1 (Telfer 30) Att: 34,647

Crystal Palace 1 (Dyer pen 17)
Everton 3 (Barmby 3, Ferguson 12, Madar 34)
Att: 23,311

Liverpool 2 (Redknapp 71, 84)
Wimbledon 0 Att: 38,011

Man Utd 2 (Giggs 44, 67)
Tottenham 0 Att: 55,281

Sheffield Wed 2 (Di Canio 1, Newsome 51)
Newcastle Utd 1 (Tomasson 20) Att: 29,446

West Ham 6 (Lampard 5, Abou 31, 52, Moncur 57, Hartson 67, Lazaridis 90)
Barnsley 0 Att: 23,714

Sunday, January 11

Derby 3 (Sturridge 15, 40, Wanchope 88)
Blackburn 1 (Sutton 87) Att: 27,823

Saturday, January 17

Barnsley 1 (Ward 26)
Crystal Palace 0 Att: 17,819

Blackburn 5 (Sherwood 21, Gallacher 29, 54, 68, Ripley 81)
Aston Villa 0 Att: 24,834

Saints and winners...Kevin Davies scores for Southampton against Man Utd

Coventry 2 (Whelan 21, Dublin pen 66)
Arsenal 2 (Bergkamp 50, Anelka 57) Att: 22,864

Leeds 1 (Pembridge og 63)
Sheffield Wed 2 (Newsome 51, Booth 83) Att: 33,166

Leicester 0
Liverpool 0 Att: 21,663

Newcastle 2 (Barnes 6, Ketsbaia 90)
Bolton 1 (Blake 72) Att: 36,767

Tottenham 1 (Klinsmann 7)
West Ham 0 Att: 30,284

Wimbledon 0 Derby 0 Att: 13,031

Sunday, January 18

Everton 3 (Speed 39, Ferguson 62, Duberry og 83)
Chelsea 1 (Flo 37) Att: 32,355

Monday, January 19

Southampton 1 (Davies 3)
Man Utd 0 Att: 15,241

Tuesday, January 20

Liverpool 1 (Owen 17)
Newcastle 0 Att: 42,791

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manchester Utd	23	15	4	4	51	17	49
Blackburn	23	12	8	3	44	24	44
Liverpool	23	13	5	5	39	19	44
Chelsea	23	13	3	7	50	25	42
Arsenal	22	10	8	4	39	26	38
Derby	23	10	6	7	37	29	36
Leeds	23	10	5	8	32	27	35
West Ham	23	11	1	11	34	33	34
Leicester	23	7	9	7	26	22	30
Newcastle	23	8	5	10	24	29	29
Sheffield Wed	23	8	5	10	36	46	29
Southampton	23	8	4	11	26	30	28
Aston Villa	23	7	6	10	26	33	27
Everton	23	7	5	11	26	33	26
Wimbledon	22	6	7	9	21	26	25
Coventry	23	5	9	9	23	33	24
Crystal Palace	23	5	8	10	21	32	23
Tottenham	23	6	5	12	20	39	23
Bolton	23	4	10	9	20	35	22
Barnsley	23	6	3	14	20	57	21

FA CUP – 3RD RND

Jan 3: Arsenal 0 Port Vale 0; Barnsley 1 Bolton 0; Blackburn 4 Wigan Athletic 2; Crystal Palace 2 Scunthorpe 0; Derby 2 Southampton 0; Leeds 4 Oxford Utd 0; Leicester 4 Northampton Town 0; Liverpool 1 Coventry 3; Portsmouth 2 Aston Villa 2; Watford 1 Sheffield Wed 1; West Ham 2 Emley 1.
Jan 4: Chelsea 3 Man Utd 5; Everton 0 Newcastle 1; Wimbledon 0 Wrexham 0.
Jan 5: Tottenham 3 Fulham 1.

FA CUP – 3RD RND REPLAYS

Jan 13: Wrexham 2 Wimbledon 3
Jan 14: Aston Villa 1 Portsmouth 0; Port Vale 1 Arsenal 1 *(aet, Arsenal won on pens)*; **Sheffield Wed 0 Watford 0** *(aet, Sheffield Wed win on pens).*

FA CUP – 4TH RND

Jan 24: Aston Villa 4 West Bromwich 0; Coventry 2 Derby 0; Crystal Palace 3 Leicester 0; Huddersfield 0 Wimbledon 1; Leeds 2 Grimsby 0; Man Utd 5 Walsall 1; Middlesbrough 1 Arsenal 2; Tottenham 1 Barnsley 1.
Jan 25: Man City 1 West Ham 2; Stevenage 1 Newcastle .
Jan 26: Sheffield Wed 0 Blackburn 3.

LEAGUE CUP – QUARTER-FINALS

Jan 6: Reading 0 Middlesbrough 1; West Ham 1 Arsenal 2.
Jan 7: Newcastle 0 Liverpool 2 *(aet)*; **Ipswich 2 Chelsea 2** (aet, *Chelsea win on pens).*

FRANCE

Saturday, January 10

Chateauroux 3 (Mayele 52, Preget 67, Traore 86)
Auxerre 2 (Deniaud 29, Guivarc'h pen 89) Att: 14,287

Guingamp 1 (Moreira 71)
Montpellier 2 (Bakayoko 46, Agbo 90) Att: 12,000

Metz 1 (Rodriguez 43)
Rennes 0 Att: 13,171

Monaco 0
Cannes 1 (Grassi 59) Att: 4,500

Lyon 2 (Caveglia 61, 82)
Marseille 1 (L. Blanc 3) Att: 29,416

Toulouse 1 (Tiehi 20)
Le Havre 0 Att: 7,500

Nantes 1 (Leroux 63)
Lens 0 Att: 16,000

Paris SG 2 (Rabesandratana 53, Simone 73)
Strasbourg 1 (Nouma 82) Att: 37,907

Wednesday, January 14

Cannes 2 (Grassi 22, Vanenburg 66)
Chateauroux 2 (Traore 7, 15) Att: 5,000

Marseille 3 (Camara 3, Gravelaine 10, Ravanelli 29)
Guingamp 0 Att: 28,000

Tuesday, January 20

Cannes 1 (Mazzoncini 86)
Metz 1 (Pires 41) Att: 5,000

Marseille 1 (Echouafni 45)
Monaco 1 (Benarbia 87) Att: 34,424

Wednesday, January 21

Auxerre 3 (Guivarc'h 9, 61, 68)
Toulouse 1 (Tiehi 16) Att: 5,000

Bastia 2 (Laurent 37, Kozniku 90)
Paris SG 0 Att: 5,000

Le Havre 0
Bordeaux 0 Att: 10,770

Lens 1 (Smicer 27)
Guingamp 0 Att: 15,557

Montpellier 2 (Delaye 14, Rizzetto 35)
Nantes 0 Att: 8,835

Rennes 3 (Huard 52, Darcheville 76, Diawara 78)
Chateauroux 0 Att: 9,291

Strasbourg 1 (Seo 56)
Lyon 2 (Pedros 11, Caveglia 22) Att: 12,899

Saturday, January 24

Chateauroux 0
Marseille 3 (Gravelaine 30, Ravanelli 49, Le Blanc pen 86) Att: 16,000

Bordeaux 4 (Grenet 4, Micoud 29, Musampa 51, Wiltord 57)
Strasbourg 4 (Baticle pen 20, 48, Seo 31, Nouma 90) Att: 19,000

Metz 0
Bastia 1 (Kozniku 38) Att: 14,669

Monaco 4 (Trezeguet 33, 76, 84, Djetou 48)
Montpellier 0 Att: 4,500

Paris SG 0
Le Havre 2 (Pouget 22, 72) Att: 31,491

Rennes 2 (Weiser 62, Gousse 80)
Cannes 0 Att: 13,909

Toulouse 1 (Rossi 65)
Lens 2 (Drobnjak 27, Ziani 64) Att: 9,000

Sunday, January 25

Nantes 2 (Carotti 52, Gourvennec 69)
Guingamp 0 Att: 22,223

Lyon 1 (Cocard 64)
Auxerre 0 Att: 23,000

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Metz	24	13	7	4	36	20	46
Monaco	24	14	3	7	39	23	45
Marseille	24	13	5	6	34	17	44
PSG	24	13	5	6	36	23	44
Lens	24	13	4	7	33	26	43
Lyon	24	12	2	10	29	26	38
Bordeaux	24	9	10	5	32	28	37
Auxerre	24	11	3	10	41	34	36
Bastia	24	9	8	7	25	19	35
Montpellier	24	7	9	8	24	28	30
Nantes	24	8	5	11	23	28	29
Toulouse	24	7	7	10	21	31	28
Le Havre	24	5	11	8	21	24	26
Guingamp	24	6	6	12	20	31	24
Rennes	24	6	5	13	26	36	23
Chateauroux	24	6	5	13	23	42	23
Strasbourg	24	5	7	12	28	37	22
Cannes	24	6	4	14	23	41	22

FRENCH CUP

Jan 16: Caen 1 Toulouse 0.
Jan 17: Aubervilliers 1 Bordeaux 7; Bastia 1 Niort 0; Bretignolles 0 Nantes 3; Cannes 1 Valence 0; Dijon 1 Monaco 2 *(aet)*; **Epinal 2 Strasbourg 1; Lens 2 Le Havre 1; St-Denis-St-Leu 0 Lyon 2; Segre 1 Auxerre 2; Sete 0 Marseille 3; Rennes 1 Chateauroux 0; Thionville 1 Guingamp 5; Thouars 1 Paris SG 3; Toulon 4 Nice 2** *(aet)*; **Le Mans 1 Metz 1** *(aet, Metz won on pens).*

LEAGUE CUP

Auxerre 3 Guingamp 0; Marseille 1 Chateauroux 0
Jan 5: Cannes 3 Strasbourg 2; Epinal 0 Toulouse 0 *(abandoned)*; **Gueugnon 1 Metz 2; Le Havre 5 Lorient 3; Le Mans 1 Lille 0; Lens 1 Rennes 0; Martigues 1 Beauvais 0; Montpellier 1 Nantes 0; Mulhouse 0 Bordeaux 3; Poitiers 2 Nimes 1; Monaco 1 Niort 1** *(Niort win on pens)*; **Nancy 2 Bastia 2** *(Nancy win on pens)*; **St Etienne 1 Sochaux 1** *(Sochaux win on pens).*
Jan 6: Paris SG 1 Lyon 0.
Jan 13: Epinal 0 Toulouse 2.

GREECE

Dec 21: Kalamata 1 AEK 2; Panathinaikos 5 Ionikos 1; OFI 1 Athinaikos 1; Paniliakos 1 Heracles 1; Xanthi 3 Ethnikos 0; Panionios 3 Kavala 0; PAOK 3 Veroia 1; Apollon 0 Olympiakos 5; Proodeytiki 1 Panahaiki 0.
Dec 28: Ionikos 0 Kalamata 0.
Jan 4: AEK 3 OFI 0; Athinaikos 4 Xanthi 1; Ethnikos 0 PAOK 1; Ionikos 0 Paniliakos 0; Heracles 1 Panionios 0; Kavala 0 Apollon 2; Panahaiki 1 Olympiakos 2; Panathinaikos 1 Kalamata 0; Veroia 2 Proodeytiki 2.
Jan 10: Panahaiki 2 Kavala 0.
Jan 11: Apollon 0 Heracles 0; Kalamata1 OFI 0; Olympiakos 4 Veroia 1; PAOK 1 Athinaikos 0; Paniliakos 0 Panathinaikos 0; Panionios 2 Ionikos 2; Proodeytiki 2 Ethnikos 3.
Jan 12: Xanthi 0 AEK 0.
Jan 18: AEK 3 PAOK 0; Athinaikos 0 Proodeytiki 1; Ethnikos 1 Olympiakos 3; Ionikos 1 Apollon 1; Heracles 1 Panahaiki 3; Kavala 1 Veroia 0; OFI 1 Xanthi 2; Panathinaikos 1 Panionios 2; Paniliakos 1 Kalamata 1.
Jan 24: Apollon 2 Panathinaikos 5.
Jan 25: Kalamata 1 Xanthi 2; Kavala 2 Ethnikos 1; Olympiakos 4 Athinaikos 0; PAOK 1 OFI 0; Panahaiki 0 Ionikos 1; Panionios 3.Paniliakos 1; Proodeytiki 3 AEK 2; Veroia 0 Heracles 1.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	19	16	1	2	52	15	49
AEK	19	15	2	2	40	16	47
Panathinaikos	19	14	1	4	45	15	43
PAOK	19	12	4	3	34	19	40
Ionikos	19	11	4	4	31	18	37
Heracles	19	9	4	6	22	20	31
Xanthi	19	9	3	7	35	33	30
Panionios	19	8	2	9	26	25	26
Apollon	19	7	4	8	21	26	25
OFI	19	7	3	9	24	33	24
Panahaiki	19	7	1	11	19	31	22
Proodeytiki	19	6	4	9	21	34	22
Paniliakos	19	5	6	8	25	31	21
Ethnikos	19	5	1	13	12	27	16
Kavala	19	4	3	12	22	38	15
Veroia	19	4	2	13	20	34	14
Kalamata	19	3	4	12	11	27	13
Athinaikos	19	3	3	13	13	31	12

ISRAEL

Jan 24: M Ashdod 0 Betar Jerusalem 4; H Tel Aviv 1 M Herzliya 0; M Haifa 2 H Petah Tikva 1; M Petah Tikva 0 H Haifa 0; H Kfar Sava 1 M Tel Aviv 1; H Jerusalem 3 H Ashkelon 3; H Beit She'an 3 H Rishon Lezion 1; Bnei Yehuda 1 H Beersheba 1.

ISRAEL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Betar Jerusalem	16	10	6	0	40	16	36
H. Tel Aviv	16	10	5	1	16	6	35
M. Haifa	16	9	3	4	29	18	30
H. Haifa	16	8	6	2	26	15	30
H. Petah Tikva	16	8	3	5	24	19	27
H. Jerusalem	16	5	7	4	21	22	22
H. Kfar Sava	16	6	4	6	20	21	22
M. Ironi Ashdod	16	5	7	4	21	23	22
M. Herzliya	16	4	6	6	20	20	18
M. Tel Aviv	16	4	5	7	17	20	17
M. Petah Tikva	16	3	8	5	10	14	17
H. I. Rishon Lezion	16	4	5	7	19	25	17
H. Beit She'an	16	3	5	8	16	25	14
H. Ashkelon	16	3	4	9	16	27	13
B. Y. Tel Aviv	16	2	6	8	13	21	12
H. Beersheba	16	1	6	9	16	32	9

ITALY

Sunday, January 4

Atalanta 2 (Sgro 67, Carrera 88)
Piacenza 2 (Rastelli 87, Vierchowod 90) Att: 17,860

Bologna 2 (Baggio 28, pen 90)
Brescia 1 (Marocchi og 80) Att: 30,398

Fiorentina 1 (Batistuta 7)
Sampdoria 1 (Montella 78) Att: 34,184

Inter 1 (Djorkaeff 47)
Juventus 0 Att: 80,569

Lecce 2 (Cyprien 43, Conticchio 88)
Empoli 2 (Ametrano 16, 45) Att: 16,186

Embarrassment...PSG crashed at home to Le Havre in France

Napoli 1 (Bellucci 75)
Milan 2 (Leonardo 52, Ganz 71) Att: 44,777

Parma 1 (Chiesa pen 55)
Lazio 1 (Boksic 19) Att: 21,783

Roma 1 (Balbo 59)
Udinese 2 (Bierhoff 49, 56) Att: 58,917

Vicenza 1 (Luiso 31)
Bari 2 (Masinga 40, Zambrotta 54) Att: 15,861

Sunday, January 11

Bari 0
Atalanta 0 Att: 19,006

Brescia 1 (Hubner 53)
Fiorentina 3 (Morfeo 48, Batistuta 61, Rui Costa 81) Att: 15,985

Empoli 0
Bologna 0 Att: 9,600

Juventus 2 (Del Piero pen 27, Ferrara 76)
Vicenza 0 Att: 42,036

Lazio 4 (Rambaudi 55, Fuser 74, Boksic 83, 90)
Lecce 0 Att: 38,424

Milan 0
Roma 0 Att: 52,526

Piacenza 0
Inter 1 (Moriero 70) Att: 17,508

Sampdoria 5 (Montella 8, Signori 26, 83, Vergassola 33, 50)
Parma 2 (Maniero 54, 58) Att: 24,403

Udinese 1 (Crasson og 90)
Napoli 1 (Bellucci 27) Att: 23,834

Sunday, January 18

Atalanta 1 (Gallo 9)
Udinese 1 (Bierhoff 49) Att: 18,432

Bologna 1 (Kolyvanov 90)
Juventus 3 (Inzaghi 10, 20, Del Piero 60) Att: 36,602

Fiorentina 1 (Cois 29)
Lazio 3 (Boksic 31, Rambaudi 78, Nedved 84) Att: 36,601

Inter 0
Bari 1 (Masinga 77) Att: 63,846

Lecce 1 (Rossi 90)
Sampdoria 3 (Montella 12, 51, Signori 77) Att: 12,939

Napoli 0
Brescia 3 (Pirlo 13, Kozminski 53, Diana 90) Att: 54,072

Parma 3 (Chiesa 33, 75, Baggio 44)
Milan 1 (Ganz 70) Att: 23,935

Roma 1 (Aldair 6)
Piacenza 1 (Rastelli 85) Att: 44,603

Vicenza 1 (Luiso 89)
Empoli 0 Att: 19,087

Sunday, January 25

Bari 2 (Marcolini 74, Sala 90)
Napoli 0 Att: 29,834

Brescia 2 (Hubner 15, pen 60)
Parma 1 (Fiore 43) Att: 13,050

Empoli 1 (Esposito 3)
Inter 1 (Recoba 82) Att: 19,720

Juventus 3 (Conte 54, Zidane 72, 90)
Atalanta 1 (Caccia 71) Att: 42,940

Lazio 1 (Nedved 43)
Bologna 0 Att: 40,698

Milan 0
Fiorentina 2 (Oliveira 3, Morfeo 52) Att: 53,315

Piacenza 1 (Scienza 78)
Lecce 0 Att: 9,891

Sampdoria 1 (Mihajlovic 33)
Roma 1 (Mannini og 26) Att: 24,308

Udinese 3 (Bierhoff 20, 37, Locatelli 44)
Vicenza 0 Att: 23,086

COPPA ITALIA

QUARTER-FINAL – 1ST LEGS

Jan 6: Lazio 4 Roma 1.
Jan 7: Fiorentina 2 Juventus 2
Parma 1 Atalanta 0.
Jan 8: Milan 5 Inter 0.

QUARTER-FINALS – 2ND LEGS

Jan 20: Juventus 0 Fiorentina 0 *(Juve on away goals).*
Jan 21: Inter 1 Milan 0 *(Inter 5-1 on agg)*; **Roma 1 Lazio 2** *(Lazio 6-2 on agg).*
Jan 22: Atalanta 1 Parma 1 *(Parma 1-0 on agg).*

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	17	11	5	1	39	14	38
Inter	17	11	4	2	32	15	37
Udinese	17	10	4	3	33	25	34
Lazio	17	9	4	4	30	15	31
Parma	17	8	5	4	31	19	29
Fiorentina	17	7	6	4	36	20	27
Sampdoria	17	7	6	4	34	30	27
Roma	17	6	8	3	27	18	26
Milan	17	6	6	5	20	18	24
Bari	17	6	4	7	15	23	22
Vicenza	17	6	3	8	19	33	21
Brescia	17	6	2	9	24	28	20
Piacenza	17	3	8	6	14	21	17
Bologna	17	3	7	7	23	27	16
Empoli	17	4	4	9	22	30	16
Atalanta	17	3	5	9	16	29	14
Lecce	17	3	2	12	13	34	11
Napoli	17	1	3	13	13	42	6

MALTA

Round 13 *(Dec 28, Jan 3-4):* Floriana 0 Hibernians 0; Naxxar L. 0 Sliema W. 2; Valletta 5 Tarxien R. 0; Birkirkara 6 Xghajra T. 1; Hamrun S. 1 Pieto H. 0.

Round 14 *(Jan 10, 11, 17):* Hibernians 0 Valletta 4; Xghajra T. 0 Sliema W. 2; Floriana 3 Naxxar L. 1; Tarxien R. 1 Hamrun S. 2; Pieto H. 0 Birkirkara 1.

Round 15 *(Jan 17, 18, 24):* Naxxar L. v Xghajra T. postponed; Hamrun S. 2 Hibernians 3; Valletta 2 Floriana 3; Sliema W. 2 Pieto H. 1; Birkirkara 1 Tarxien R. 0.

MALTA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Birkirkara	15	12	2	1	28	8	38
Sliema Wanderers	15	12	1	2	36	10	37
Valletta	15	10	3	2	35	10	33
Floriana	15	9	4	2	34	11	31
Hibernians	15	8	3	4	30	18	27
Naxxar Lions	14	5	1	8	21	27	16
Hamrun Spartans	15	3	3	9	17	33	12
Pieto Hotspurs	15	3	1	11	18	25	10
Xghajra Tornadoes	14	1	2	11	7	43	5
Tarxien Rainbows	15	0	2	13	4	45	2

NOR. IRELAND

Dec 26: Ards 1 Omagh 2; Ballymena 2 Coleraine 2; Glentoran 1 Linfield 1; Portadown 2 Glenavon 0.
Jan 1: Coleraine 0 Cliftonville 2; Crusaders 1 Ards 0; Glenavon 3 Ballymena 3; Linfield 1 Portadown 1; Omagh 0 Glentoran 5.
Jan 3: Crusaders 3 Coleraine 0; Ballymena 0 Linfield 2; Portadown 1 Omagh 1.
Jan 10: Ards 1 Coleraine 0; Glenavon 2 Crusaders 2; Glentoran 2 Portadown 1; Linfield 0 Cliftonville 1; Omagh 3 Ballymena 0.
Jan 17: Ballymena1 Glentoran 2; Cliftonville 1 Omagh 0; Coleraine 3 Glenavon 3; Crusaders 1 Linfield 2; Portadown 1 Ards 0.

NORTHERN IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cliftonville	23	13	5	5	34	26	44
Portadown	25	12	7	6	36	28	43
Linfield	24	9	10	5	31	16	37
Ballymena	25	10	6	9	41	38	36
Glentoran	24	10	5	9	32	24	35
Coleraine	24	9	5	10	34	33	32
Crusaders	24	8	8	8	38	39	32
Glenavon	24	6	10	8	35	40	28
Omagh	25	5	8	12	31	47	23
Ards	24	4	6	14	25	46	18

PORTUGAL

Saturday, January 3

Academica 2 (Gaucho 3, Dario 15)
Sporting Braga 2 (Castanheira 25, Gamboa 31)

Porto 2 (Artur 56, 73)
Benfica 0

Sunday, January 4

Belenenses 0 Maritimo 2 (Bino 44, Bunbury 74)

Campomaiorense 2 (Jorginho 12, Wellington 24)
Chaves 1 (Cuc 54)

Estrela Amadora 1 (Velic 88)
Boavista 2 (Ayew 65, Martelinho 78)

Leca 1 (Constantino 2)
Guimaraes 0

Varzim 0
Salgueiros 2 (Nandinho 72, 83)

Vitoria Setubal 4 (Jose Rui 29, Chiquinho Conde 58, Pedro Miguel og 75, Amaral 80)
Farense 1 (Pedro Miguel 30)

Monday, January 5

Rio Ave 0 Sporting Lisbon 0

Friday, January 9

Salgueiros 1 (Abilio pen 71)
Porto 3 (Jardel 20, Mielcarski 82, Sergio Conceicao 85)

Saturday, January 10

Belenenses 0
Sporting Lisbon 4 (Leandro 17, 53, 82, Simao 46)

Boavista 2 (Luis Manuel 79, Martelinho 90)
Leca 0

Sporting Braga 1 (Karoglan 70) **Rio Ave 0**

Sunday, January 11

Benfica 2 (Pringle 28, 31)
Estrela 2 (Jose Carlos 65, Paulo Ferreira 85)

Chaves 1 (Raul 50)
Vitoria Setubal 3 (Kasumov 72, Chiquinho Conde 78, Jung Jae Kwon 90)

Martimo 2 (Herivelto 16, Bunbury 87)
Varzim 1 (Zacarias 78)

Farense 0 Academica 0

Guimaraes 2 (Alexandre 29, Marco Freitas 35)
Campomaiorense 1 (Vitor Manuel 86)

Saturday, January 17

Academica 1 (Joao Tomas 87)
Chaves 2 (Cuc 60, N'Tsunda 66)

Leca 1 (Kandaurov 39)
Benfica 2 (Ze da Rocha 52, Sanchez 71)

Sunday, January 18

Campomaiorense 2 (Luis Miguel 36, Wellington 53)
Boavista 2 (Ayew 9, 86)

Estrela Amadora 1 (Leal 78)
Salgueiros 0

Porto 2 (Sergio Conceicao 75, Joao M. Pinto 90)
Maritimo 1 (Asselman 44)

Rio Ave 0
Farense 3 (Hajry 79, Youssef 85, Braulio 90)

Varzim 2 (Paulo Piedade 22, Slagalo 82)
Belenenses 1 (Carrasqueira 80)

Vitoria Setubal 0 Guimaraes 0

Monday, January 19

Sporting Lisbon 1 (Oceano 65)
Sporting Braga 1 (Bruno 57)

Saturday, January 24

Campomaiorense 1 (Jorgino 52)
Benfica 2 (Sanchez 25, Poborsky 86)

Sporting Braga 1 (Formoso pen 11)
Belenses 1 (Dias 76)

Sunday, January 25

Academica 2 (Gaucho 15, Joao Tomas 18)
Guimaraes 1 (Jose Carlos 67)

Amadora 1 (Jose Carlos 4)
Maritimo 1 (Herivelto 64)

Leca 3 (Serifo 33, Alfaia 37, Constantino 62)
Salgueiros 0

Porto 4 (Capucho 3, Chippo 44, Rui Barros 54, 81)
Varzim 3 (Conteh 30, Lino 52, Zacarias 72)

Rio Ave 1 (Quinzinho 87)
Chaves 0

Sporting Braga 1 (Formoso pen 11)
Belenenses 1 (Dias 76)

Sporting Lisbon 3 (Oceano pen 7, Beto 42, Paulo Alves 88)
Farense 2 (Ramos 27, Hassan Nader 75)

Vitoria Setubal 1 (Timofte pen 25)
Boavista 2 (Chiquinho Conde 65, Ayew 69)

PORTUGUESE CUP

Jan 13: Benfica 1 Beira Mar 0.
Jan 14: Leca 0 Sporting 2; Maia 0 FC Porto 0 *(aet, Porto won 5-4 on pens)*; **Penafiel 0 Sporting Braga 1; Vila Real 0 Boavista 3; Vizela 0 Freamunde 2.**

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto	18	14	4	0	43	18	46
Vit.Guimaraes	18	10	2	6	24	13	32
Sporting	18	8	7	3	21	12	31
Rio Ave	18	9	4	5	26	21	31
Benfica	18	8	6	4	26	17	30
Maritimo	18	7	4	7	20	20	25
Leca	18	7	4	7	20	20	25
Salgueiros	18	6	6	6	21	20	24
Amadora	18	6	6	6	20	22	24
Boavista	18	5	8	5	18	18	23
Campomaiorense	18	6	5	7	25	26	23
Braga	18	5	8	5	24	25	23
Setubal	18	5	6	7	20	20	21
Farense	18	4	8	6	21	25	20
Academica	18	4	7	7	15	19	19
Varzim	18	4	6	8	14	28	18
Chaves	18	3	2	13	13	29	11
Belenenses	18	1	7	10	10	28	10

REP. OF IRELAND

Dec 26: Shamrock 1 Kilkenny 0.
Dec 27: Finn Harps 0 Dundalk 1; Sligo 2 Drogheda 1.
Dec 28: Bohemians 1 Derry 0; Cork 4 Shelbourne 4; UCD 1 St. Pats 1.
Jan 2: Drogheda 0 Bohemians 1; St. Pats 1 Sligo 2; Shelbourne 3 UCD 1.
Jan 3: Derry 0 Shamrock 1.
Jan 15: Dundalk 0 Derry 1.
Jan 16: Bohemians 0 St. Pats 0.
Jan 17: Finn Harps 2 Kilkenny 1; Sligo 1 Shelbourne 1.
Jan 18: UCD 0 Cork 0.
Jan 25: Cork 0 Sligo 0; Derry 1 Kilkenny 1; Drogheda 1 Dundalk 0; St. Pats 2 Shamrock 0; Shelbourne 0 Bohemians 1; UCD 0 Finn Harps 0.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St. Pats	21	12	7	2	31	16	43
Shelbourne	21	12	4	5	40	25	40
Cork	20	9	7	4	30	20	34
Shamrock	20	10	4	6	25	19	34
Bohemians	20	7	9	4	30	19	30
Finn Harps	20	9	3	8	29	27	30
Dundalk	20	8	5	7	26	21	29
Derry	21	7	7	7	22	19	28
Sligo	21	6	10	5	29	31	28
UCD	20	3	9	8	17	25	18
Drogheda	19	1	4	14	11	38	7
Kilkenny	19	1	3	15	11	41	6

SCOTLAND

Thursday, January 1

Hearts 2 (Fulton 6, 10)
Hibernian 2 (Walker 51, McGinlay 67) Att: 17,564

Friday, January 2

Celtic 2 (Burley 66, Lambert 85)
Rangers 0 Att: 49,350

Saturday, January 3

Kilmarnock 4 (Wright 8, 33, Mitchell 44, Roberts 88)
Motherwell 1 (Coyle 24) Att: 8,724

Aberdeen 1 (Windass 26)
Dundee Utd 0 Att: 17,025

Dunfermline 0
St Johnstone 1 (Kane 7) Att: 6,591

Saturday, January 10

Dundee Utd 1 (Winters 15)
Kilmarnock 1 (Reilly 69) Att: 7,541

Rangers 2 (Porrini 9, Laudrup 12)
Aberdeen 0 Att: 49,502

Hibernian 1 (Crawford 36)
Dunfermline 0 Att: 10,616

Motherwell 1 (Falconer 55)
Celtic 1 (Lambert 61) Att: 12,350

Monday, January 12

St Johnstone 2 (Davidson 48, O'Boyle pen 63)
Hearts 3 (Hamilton 29, 70, Naysmith 36) Att: 5,404

Saturday, January 17

Rangers 1 (Cleland 23)
Motherwell 0 Att: 49,433

Hibernian 0
St Johnstone 1 (Grant 83) Att: 9,126

Kilmarnock 2 (Wright 40, Reilly 76)
Hearts 2 (McCann 6, MacPherson og 45) Att: 11,079

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rangers	22	14	6	2	54	23	48
Hearts	22	14	3	5	49	30	45
Celtic	21	13	3	5	37	14	42
Kilmarnock	22	8	6	8	25	37	30
St.Johnstone	22	8	5	9	24	29	29
Dundee Utd	21	6	7	8	31	32	25
Dunfermline	21	5	6	10	22	39	21
Motherwell	22	5	5	12	25	38	20
Aberdeen	21	4	7	10	21	36	19
Hibernian	22	4	6	12	26	36	18

SCOTTISH CUP – 3RD RND

Jan 24: Cetlic 2 Greenock Morton 0; Dumbarton 1 Motherwell 1; Dundee Utd 1 Aberdeen 0; Dunfermline 7 Edinbrugh C 2; Hamilton 1 Rangers 2; Hearts 2 Clydebank 0; Hibernian 1 Raith Rovers 2; St Johnstone 1 Partick Thistle 0; Stranraer 0 Kilmarnock 2.

SPAIN

Saturday, January 3

Real Betis 3 (Jarni 12, Oli 46, Vidakovic 62)
Real Madrid 2 (Roberto Carlos 21, Raul 51)
Att: 47,500

Sunday, January 4

Atletico Madrid 2 (Vieri 42, Aguilera 50)
Racing Santander 1 (Diego Lopez 76) Att: 25,000

La Coruna 2 (Naybet 70, Abreu 84)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Alex 25) Att: 23,000

Espanyol 2 (Ouedec 65, 80)
Real Valladolid 0 Att: 25,800

Merida 4 (Marcos 9, Ruano 23, Sabas 80, Correa 88)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 9,000

Real Oviedo 1 (Dely Valdes 64)
Compostela 1 (Penev pen 27) Att: 16,000

Real Sociedad 1 (De Pedro 25)
Mallorca 0 Att: 20,000

Real Zaragoza 1 (Radimov 80)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Guerrero 32) Att: 30,000

Valencia 1 (Angloma 42)
Tenerife 2 (Kodro pen 50, Domingos 79) Att: 45,000

Monday, January 5

Salamanca 4 (Zegarra 43, Cesar Brito pen 80, 83, Silvani 88)
Barcelona 3 (Anderson 12, Luis Enrique 50, Giovanni 69) Att: 16,051

Saturday, January 10

Atletico Madrid 1 (Jose Mari 87)
Real Madrid 1 (Savio 68) Att: 56,500

Sunday, January 11

La Coruna 1 (Djalminha 88)
Tenerife 0 Att: 23,000

Espanyol 0
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Guerrero 60) Att: 31,500

Merida 2 (Sabas 41,44)
Real Oviedo 1 (Pompei 34) Att: 6,000

Real Sociedad 2 (Loren 83, De Paula 90)
Barcelona 2 (Luis Enrique 29, Anderson 70)
Att: 30,000

Upper hand...Fiorentina got the better of Milan at San Siro

Portuguese tussle...Jose Calado of Benfica holds off FC Porto's Paulinho Santos

Real Zaragoza 1 (Acuna 59)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 20,000

Salamanca 0
Racing Santander 0 Att: 10,500

Sporting Gijon 0
Compostela 2 (Popov 52, Ohen 56) Att: 15,000

Monday, January 12

Valencia 0 Real Mallorca 0 Att: 45,000

Saturday, January 17

Celta Vigo 1 (Sanchez 29)
Espanyol 0 Att: 27,000

Real Oviedo 3 (Pompei 9, pen 51, Dubovsky 41)
Real Zaragoza 0 Att: 14,000

Real Valladolid 2 (Santi og 31, Peternac pen 61)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Kiko 35) Att: 20,000

Sunday, January 18

Athletic Bilbao 0
Real Betis 0 Att: 40,000

Compostela 3 (Fabiano 40, Penev 68, Tabuenka 81)
Merida 0 Att: 6,000

Racing Santander 3 (Bestsjastnych 14, Abeijon 17, Correa 89)
Real Sociedad 1 (Kovacevic 87) Att: 14,000

Real Madrid 1 (Panucci 21)
Salamanca 0 Att: 90,000

Real Mallorca 0
La Coruna 0 Att: 13,000

Tenerife 2 (Domingos 62, Makaay 81)
Sporting Gijon 1 (David Cano 86) Att: 20,000

Monday, January 19

Barcelona 3 (Luis Enrique 33, Rivaldo 50, Caceres og 53)
Valencia 4 (Morigi 69, Lopez 75, 88, Ortega 90) Att: 90,000

Saturday, January 24

Atletico Madrid 3 (Vieri 13, 51, Andrei 72)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 35,000

Sunday, January 25

La Coruna 3 (Fran 2, Abreu 75, Djalminha 84)
Barcelona 1 (Pizzi 85) Att: 32,000

Espanyol 0
Real Oviedo 0 Att: 11,200

Betis 2 (Jarni 31, Alexis 57)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 42,000

Real Sociedad 4 (Kuhbauer 24, Kovacevic 39, 46, Aranzabal 78)
Real Madrid 2 (Morientes 5, Roberto Carlos 50) Att: 29,350

Real Zaragoza 1 (Aragon pen 90)
Merida 1 (Cleber 85) Att: 20,000

Sporting Gijon 1 (Ledjachov pen 6)
Mallorca 3 (Amato 2, Galvez 27, Valeron 77) Att: 15,096

Tenerife 5 (Kodro 22, pen 58, Julio Llorente 53, 84, Slovak 87)
Compostela 1 (Penev pen 26) Att: 20,000

Valencia 6 (Ilie 3, 29, 71, Angloma 51, Claudio Lopez 75, 77)
Racing Santander 1 (Abeijon 86) Att: 45,000

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	22	12	7	3	38	22	43
Barcelona	21	13	2	6	47	33	41
Sociedad	22	10	9	3	33	19	39
Atletico Madrid	22	10	7	5	46	28	37
Athletic	22	9	9	4	30	24	36
Celta	22	10	4	8	31	27	34
Espanyol	22	8	9	5	27	15	33
Betis	20	9	6	5	28	25	33
Mallorca	22	8	8	6	29	19	32
Zaragoza	22	7	8	7	31	38	29
Valencia	22	8	4	10	31	29	28
Oviedo	22	6	10	6	23	26	28
Racing	22	7	6	9	25	31	27
Deportivo	22	5	11	6	23	24	26
Salamanca	22	6	6	10	18	25	24
Tenerife	22	6	6	10	23	33	24
Merida	22	6	6	10	20	31	24
Valladolid	21	6	5	10	19	29	23
Compostela	22	5	8	9	28	39	23
Sporting	22	0	3	19	18	51	3

COPA DEL REY – 3RD RND 2ND LEGS

Jan 7: Celta Vigo 5 Huelva 2; Compostela 2 Alaves 2; Merida 4 Lorca 1; Santander 2 Osasuna 0; Mallorca 2 Las Palmas 1; Real Sociedad 4 Xerex 2; Real Zaragoza 5 Novelda 1; Valencia 2 Figueras 1 *(aet)*.
Jan 8: Salamanca 2 Extremadora 1.

4TH RND 1ST LEGS

Jan 13: Alaves 1 Real Madrid 0.
Jan 14: Extremadora 2 Athletic Bilbao 0; Osasuna 0 La Coruna 1; Mallorca 1 Celta Vigo 0; Real Sociedad 0 Real Betis 2; Valladolid 1 Merida 1; Zarogoza 2 Atletico Madrid 0.
Jan 15: Barcelona 2 Valencia 1.

4TH RND 1ST LEGS

Jan 20: Atletico Madrid 2 Real Zaragoza 1 *(Zaragoza 3-2 on agg)*.
Jan 21: Atletic Bilbao 4 Extremadura 1 *(Bilbao 4-3 on agg)*; **Celta Vigo 2 Mallorca 1** *(2-2 on agg, Mallorca on away goals)*; **La Coruna 2 Osasuna 1** *(La Coruna 3-1 on agg)*; **Merida 3 Real Valladolid 1** *(Merida 4-2 on agg)*; **Real Betis 1 Real Sociedad 1** *(Betis 3-1 on agg)*; **Real Madrid 2 Alaves 1** *(2-2 on agg, Alaves on away goals)*.
Jan 22: Valencia 1 Barcelona 3 *(Barca 5-2 on agg)*.

TURKEY

Jan 18: Sekerspor 2 Besiktas 0; Galatasaray 2 Ankaragucu 1; Trabzonspor 2 Kocaelispor 2; G.Antep 2 Fenerbahce 0; Altay 2 Bursaspor 1; Antalyaspor 2 G.Birligi 1; Istanbulspor 3 Dardanelspor 1; Kayserispor 0 Karabukspor 1; Vanspor 1 Samsunspor 0.
Jan 25: Ankaragucu 6 Kayserispor 3; Antalyaspor 2 G.Antep 1; Besiktas 3 G.Birligi 1; Bursaspor 3 Galatasaray 2; Karabukspor 0 Istanbulspor 1; Fenerbahce 0 Samsunspor 0; Dardanelspor 4 Sekerspor 1; Kocaelispor 0 Altay 1; Vanspor 0 Trabzonspor 2.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	19	12	4	3	33	14	40
Trabzonspor	19	12	4	3	36	19	40
Istanbulspor	19	10	6	3	37	20	36
Galatasaray	19	11	3	5	42	26	36
Besiktas	19	9	6	4	37	21	33
Bursaspor	19	9	4	6	29	25	31
Dardanelspor	19	7	6	6	25	20	27
Karabukspor	19	8	3	8	19	25	27
Samsunspor	19	7	5	7	24	22	26
Kocaelispor	19	6	6	7	24	22	24
Ankaragucu	19	6	5	8	22	26	23
Altay	19	6	4	9	21	32	22
G.Antep	19	5	5	9	22	26	20
Antalyaspor	19	5	5	9	28	35	20
Sekerspor	19	5	5	9	21	41	20
Kayserispor	19	5	4	10	18	30	19
G.Birligi	19	4	6	9	17	21	18
Vanspor	19	1	5	13	14	44	8

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

The first round groups:
GROUP 1: America and Bucaramanga (Colombia), Barcelona and Deportivo Quito (Ecuador).
GROUP 2: Vasco da Gama and Gremio (Brazil) and FC Caracas and Atletico Zulia (Venezuela) or America and Guadalajara (Mexico).
GROUP 3: Universidad Catolica and Colo Colo (Chile), Olimpia and Cerro Porteno (Paraguay).
GROUP 4: Bolivar and Oriente Petrolero (Bolivia), Penarol and Nacional (Uruguay).
GROUP 5: River Plate and Colon (ARgentina), Alianza Lima and Sporting Cristal (Peru).

BRAZIL

Sao Paulo State Championship - 1st stage

GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portuguesa Santista	4	3	0	1	8	6	9
Ituano	4	2	1	1	9	6	7
Sao Jose	4	2	0	2	8	7	6
Juventus	4	2	0	2	8	8	6
Portuguesa	4	1	1	1	4	5	4
Uniao Sao Joao	4	0	2	2	2	7	2

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rio Branco	4	2	2	0	7	4	8
Guarani	4	1	3	0	6	4	6
Matonense	4	1	2	1	7	9	5
Mogi Mirim	4	1	1	2	8	8	4
Internacional Limeira	4	0	4	0	4	4	4
Aracatuba	4	0	2	2	3	6	2

*Top four in each group qualify for second stage with Palmeiras, Corinthians, Sao Paulo and Santos.

Rio-Sao Paulo tournament

GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palmeiras	3	2	1	0	8	5	7
Vasca da Gama	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Botafogo (Rio)	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Corinthians	3	0	0	3	2	6	0

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Sao Paulo	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Fluminense	2	0	2	2	3	4	1
Flamengo	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

*Top two of each group qualify for semi finals.

Carioca (Rio State) championship

First stage: Olaria, Itaperuna, Madureira, Volta Redonda, Friburgense, America-Rio de Janeiro. The teams play each other twice in the first stage and the t qualify automatically.
Second stage: Top two plus Flamengo, Fluminense, Botafogo, Vasco da Gama, Americano and Bangu. Teams play each other once; winners enter final.
Third stage: The same eight teams compete, in which they again meet each other once, with the winners meeting the stage two champions in the final. If the same team win stages two and three they take the title automatically.

ECUADOR

CHAMPIONSHIP – FINAL ROUND

Jan 10, 11: Nacional 4 Aucas 1; LDU 3 Barcelona 2; Emelec 1 Dep Quito 0.
Jan 18: Barcelona 2 Emelec 2; Aucas 1 LDU 2; Nacional 1 Dep Quito 2.
Jan 21: Nacional 2 Barcelona 3; Dep Quito 2 Aucas 0; Emelec 5 LDU 3
Jan 25: Aucas 2 Emelec 2; LDU 2 Nacional 1; Barcelona 3 Dep Quito 0

ECUADOR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	10	4	4	2	21	15	19
Deportivo Quito	10	5	3	2	16	10	19
Emelec	10	4	3	3	18	18	15
LDU Quito	10	3	4	3	15	17	14
El Nacional	10	3	2	5	17	17	11
Aucas	10	1	4	5	9	19	7

CONCACAF

MEXICO

GROUP ONE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atlante	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
Veracruz	6	2	1	3	10	11	7
Leon FC	6	1	2	3	2	6	5
At. Celaya	6	0	3	3	3	8	3
Puebla	6	0	2	4	6	13	2

GROUP TWO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Toluca	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
Cruz Azul	6	4	1	1	9	7	13
Tigres UNL	6	2	1	3	5	10	7
Monterrey	6	0	3	3	2	8	3
Guadalajara	6	0	2	4	3	8	2

GROUP THREE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	6	4	0	2	11	6	12
At. Morelia	6	2	2	2	6	6	8
Pumas UNAM	6	2	2	2	8	8	8
Toros Neza	6	1	2	3	5	8	5

GROUP FOUR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tecos UAG	6	5	1	0	10	5	16
Necaxa	6	4	0	2	10	6	12
Atlas	6	3	2	1	11	7	11
America	6	3	1	2	12	9	10

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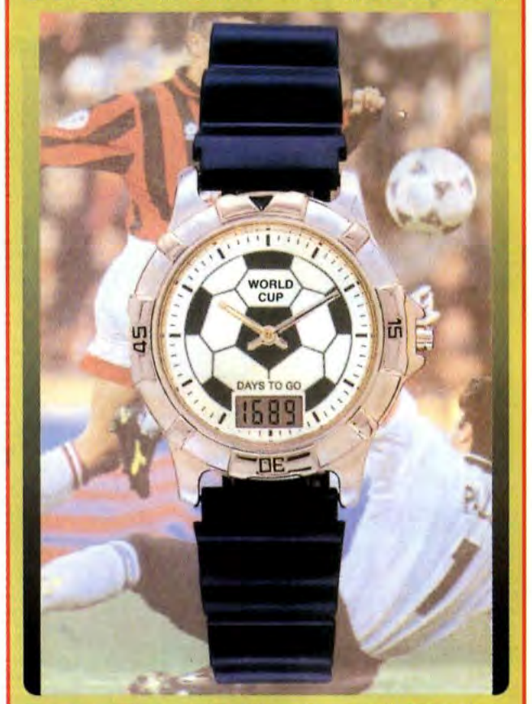

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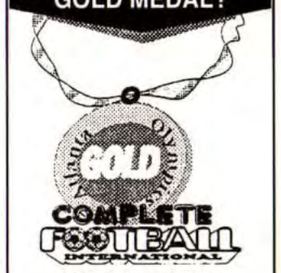

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Brian Glanville's LAST WORD

Don't let me be misunderstood...Ronaldo

Being the best is no defence

TO BE a soccer star, even the supposedly best player in the world, is alas no defence against the slings and arrows of outrageous managers and presidents. Ronaldo, the Brazilian prodigy who has been named the world's best for the past two years, and Roberto Baggio, who held that title just a few years ago, will bitterly tell you as much.

A few weeks ago, after a couple of poor performances, Ronaldo was publicly rebuked by the president of Inter, Massimo Moratti. "He is not himself," said Moratti. "He is playing badly. I don't know what his problem is, but he's certainly got one."

Now, Ronaldo might have responded, he's got another one – Moratti. Where sympathy and some kind of understanding might legitimately have been expected, censure has been the response. Asked if he thought Ronaldo was in a state of crisis, Moratti was moved to respond, "It seems like that to me...and he'd do well to get that into his head."

Get what into his head, for goodness sake? "I'm in a state of crisis." Big deal. How would that help? There could scarcely be a sharper contrast between the two men. Ronaldo, originally so poor that he hadn't even the bus fare to go for a trial with his favourite club, Flamengo, which he still hopes one day to join. Moratti, son of the big oil man, Angelo Moratti, former president of Inter. Moratti senior was the man unforgettably nailed in Hungarian writer Peter Borenich's splendid exposé, *Only the Ball has a Skin*, for inviting Hungarian referee Gyorgy Vadas and his linesmen to his sumptuous villa before the 1966 Inter v Real Madrid European Cup semi-final, and offering them gifts galore to bend the game in Inter's favour.

Ronaldo's troubles ran almost concurrently with those of Baggio in Bologna. Inexplicably, incredibly, manager Renzo Ulivieri dropped Baggio for the home game against his old club, Juventus. Baggio, incensed, walked out of training camp, and subsequently was fined £17,000. Technically, he was out of order, but who can find it in his heart to blame him?

'Where sympathy for and some kind of understanding of Ronaldo might have been expected, censure has been the response'

Most significantly, Ulivieri also dropped his Russian striker, Igor Kolivanov, only to bring him off the bench when Juve had the game well won. Kolivanov proved himself Bologna's best player, scoring their consolatory goal from a fine free-kick.

Both players are well used to such treatment. Baggio's, indeed, is an extraordinary story of snubs and ostracism. Juventus cast him out a few seasons back, to general surprise. Manager Marcello Lippi said he did not want Baggio to leave but, as the poet said, "thou shalt not kill but needst not strive officiously to keep alive." Off then to Milan, and more trouble.

Initially, and latterly, with Fabio Capello, who kept leaving Baggio out, to his dismay. But above all his troubles were with Arrigo Sacchi, first with Italy, then, when to his horror Baggio found Sacchi 'pursuing' him to Milan, at club level, too.

Quello e matto, that man is mad, are words that have rung down the years since Baggio uttered them as he left the field at Giants Stadium during the 1994 World Cup. To his amazement, he had just been taken off when reserve keeper Marchegiani replaced Pagliuca, who had just been sent off.

Subsequently, Baggio's fine goals won Italy their games against Nigeria, Spain and Bulgaria, even if he did miss that post-extra time penalty in the Final.

Kolivanov knows all about such treatment. At Foggia, he somehow got on the wrong side of his dour Czech manager, Zdenek Zeman, and was condemned pre-season to train with the juniors.

Other examples are legion: Gianluca Vialli at Chelsea, Temur Ketsbaia at Newcastle. The Georgian was best on the field when Newcastle won at Crystal Palace, yet for all the team's problems up front he has singularly failed to win a regular starting place.

When he scored the winning goal against Bolton, threw his shirt into the crowd and began kicking an advertising board, did he have Kenny Dalglish in mind?

Of black and blond

JOHN MOTSON and the black players. Surely a storm in a teacup. Motson meant no harm. If you are sitting at the far end of the inadequate press box at Selhurst Park, it is often hard to tell, at the other end, one of Wimbledon's black players from another.

In different circumstances, when press box facilities are dire, it is difficult to tell one blond player from another.

As one who fought the good fight for black players from the beginning – when they were being wantonly and disgracefully put down by racist idiots within the game – I'm sorry all this has happened.

Let the last ironic word go to that marvellous West Indian cricketer, Sir Learie Constantine. In his autobiography he wrote about his first match in England, when he got a batsman out and another came in. It was at that moment, he said, that it dawned on him: all white men looked the same!

Unmistakable...John Motson

Pele sounds a warning

Speaking out...Pele

IT WAS interesting to find Pele criticising his former Brazil team-mate Mario Lobo Zagallo for what he feels is his mistaken build-up to the World Cup.

Too many games, far too much travelling, too much reliance on the brilliance of individuals to win games. The charges have force; but how much of the problem is caused by the demands of the Brazilian team's sponsors?

The problem in any case is worldwide. There are too many absurd tournaments like the Confederations Cup and the Gold Cup. The big clubs are getting angrier, Blatter's proposals more and more ludicrous – for instance, his suggestion that Leagues be cut in size to make room for absurdities like the proposed world championship for clubs.

Sooner or later the balloon is going to go up. Clubs won't go on paying fortunes to stars they cannot use because their countries want them.

Ludicrous offer...Alan Rothenberg

Tinkering will not solve problems

ALAN ROTHENBERG has been involved in American soccer for over 30 years, but he still does not really seem to understand the game. He allegedly made a lot of money running the 1994 World Cup, and was almost brutally attacked by *Sports Illustrated* afterwards. (What happened to the libel action?)

Now he has come out with the ludicrous offer to FIFA – and presumably to the dreaded Sepp (51 Bad Ideas a Day) Blatter – to make the MLS a laboratory for experiments with the laws.

Why? The implication is that soccer is in some kind of crisis and needs reviving. That may be true in the USA and even in Japan, mere tributaries of the game, but it certainly isn't true of football at large, which is booming. Even if at times, watching Premiership games, you wonder if it deserves to be.

The problems of the MLS will not be solved by mucking about with the laws, which has been tried often enough before. Its difficulties are intimately related to its poor quality. I said before the 94 World Cup that the tournament would be an enormous success but might well work against the hopes of the American professional game. Having seen and enjoyed the best, American fans were hardly going to be satisfied with second and third-rate fare.

This has been especially true in New York, perhaps the salient football city in America, where MetroStars have been anything but salient. The vastly expensive acquisition of Carlos Alberto Parreira, Brazil's winning manager in 1994, was a dreadful flop.

He imported mediocre Brazilians, deployed a sadly inadequate team, and eventually skipped off to Arabia when his contract still had a long time to run.

The Metros' likeable general manager, Charlie Stillitano, was surprisingly indulgent to Parreira. Perhaps he was just glad to get rid of a colossally overpaid failure.

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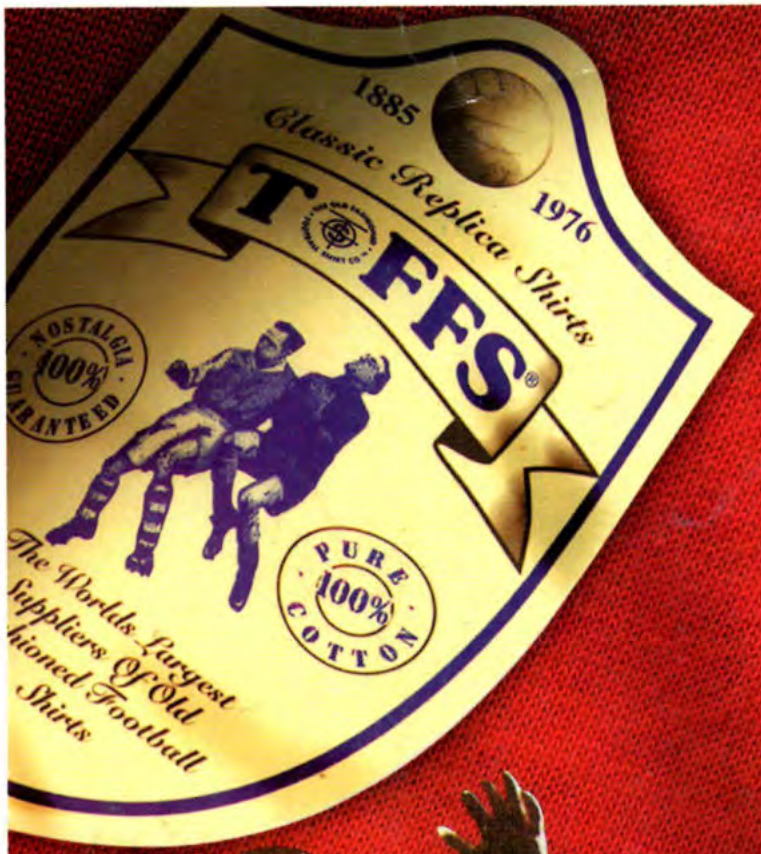

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Part Two

France 98

Croatia

Denmark

England

France

Germany

Holland

Iran

Italy

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME to the second of WORLD SOCCER's essential 40-page guides to the teams taking part in France 98.

Parts three and four will be presented free with the April and May editions of WORLD SOCCER respectively. For those readers who missed Part One, copies are available from our back issues department. For details, see the contents page of this month's magazine.

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Editor **Gavin Hamilton** Design **Gary Payne**

Croatia

Can the luck continue?

Zdravko Reic reports on a coach riding the wheel of fortune

CROATIA's squad worked through the France 98 qualifying programme by using much more effort than expected. The players, under coach Miroslav (Mr Optimism) Blazevic, had thought it would be a routine job. Not so!

They really had to sweat before they got through by beating Ukraine in a play-off after finishing second in Group One, two points behind Denmark and one ahead of Greece.

Despite all the ups and downs, however, with demands for Blazevic to resign, the coach remains in office (his friendship with President Tudjman does not do him any harm) and it must be said that he can be a great motivator has a deep knowledge of the game, and has a valuable assistant: Mr Luck.

Blazevic makes no secret of his good fortune, which continued beyond the qualifiers and into the draw for the first round of the tournament, in which Croatia play Argentina, Jamaica and Japan in their first appearance in the World Cup finals.

If Zvonimir Boban, Davor Suker and the others cannot get into the second stage, Blazevic may need more than the President's assistance.

The qualifying trail began back in April 1996 when the Croats easily beat Bosnia-Herzegovina 4-1 in what was ostensibly an away game, played in neutral Bologna.

After that, three home games in a row could have put the Croats in the clear, but they surprisingly could only draw all three, 1-1 with both Greece and Denmark and 3-3 with Slovenia.

The loss of a 3-1 lead in that match led to a furious protest from fans of Hajduk Split, the strongest supporters' organisation in the country, and the demolition of a couple of thousand seats that had been newly installed in the stadium, one of the most beautiful in the world.

After that, Blazevic's position looked desperate, but a 1-0 win in the next match, away to Greece, restored him to favour. Only 16 minutes remained when Suker scored the only goal, and there was even less time remaining when Boban completed a 3-2 defeat of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the next fixture.

This was followed by a trip to Copenhagen, and the reassured Blazevic felt able to boast that "the world will see our strength in this, our toughest game".

The result was a 3-1 defeat, but Mr Luck played his part by helping Suker to score a goal that turned out to be one of the most important in the entire qualifying competition.

Few people realised it at the time (Blazevic was among them), but if Denmark had won 3-0 they could have afforded to lose their last fixture, in Greece, and still have topped the group, with the Greeks second.

But, having conceded Suker's goal, Denmark needed at least a draw in Athens to finish top. They finished 0-0, while Croatia won 3-1 against Slovania to force the Greeks down into third.

An exultant Blazevic calmed down a little and then forecast a France-Croatia final, saying: "Croatian players are the most gifted in Europe. They are the European Brazilians.

"I'm convinced that we are ready for something big, and it will happen in France. I admire France and the French in many respects, and when I was coach of Nantes I helped in the development of some of their players. They will get to the Final. And so will we."

Blazevic then had to concentrate on the small matter of the two-leg play-off with Ukraine, in which home advantage proved vital. A 2-0 win in Zagreb, with goals from Slaven Bilic and Goran Vlaovic, meant that a reinforced defence had little trouble in Kiev.

Even so, the Boksic goal that earned a 1-1 draw owed as much to luck as to judgment.

Blazevic had done a good job over those two games, concentrating on the task and abstaining from foolish forecasts. This showed the hand of the recently-elected president of the Croatian Football Association, Branko Miksa, who took over from Josip Soic.

Miksa is a prominent businessman and a former Mayor of Zagreb, used to getting his own way. The form showed by the 'Fiery Eleven', as the fans call the national team, did credit to him and to the coach. Since then, however, Blazevic has announced that three former regulars – Igor Stimac of Derby, Nikola Jerkan of Casino Salzburg and Nikola Jurkevic of Austria Salzburg – will not be in the squad for France. Instead they are likely to be replaced by yet more youngsters from Croatia Zagreb, the domestic club providing the bulk of the squad.

Goran Juric and Dario Simic quickly established themselves as essential selections during the qualifying games. The players, both with Croatia Zagreb, took the place of Stimac and Jerkan. Juric only moved to Croatia Zagreb last autumn, after transferring between three clubs in quick succession – Hravtski Dragovoljac, FC Zagreb and Croatia Zagreb – all deals closely connected to the then FA president Josip Soic.

Simic has been linked with both Juventus and Milan, but Croatia Zagreb, strongly supported by President Tudjman, are determined to keep him. Last year the club bought Robert Prosinecki from Spanish side Sevilla and the midfielder is now playing some of the best football of his career.

For Blazevic the dependence on players from Croatia Zagreb, the domestic champions, at the expense of more experienced foreign-based players, is a gamble. The move may well do a lot for team spirit, but there is no guarantee that the kids will be adequate deputies for the veterans they will replace. Most of the squad, however, have plenty of experience and are determined to do well on their last big stage, for most will be too old by the time the next World Cup comes round.

Blazevic, ever the optimist, certainly does things his way, although he is a keen follower of astrology. "I'll be coach of this team as long as I live," he says. "It's written in the stars."

Before the last round of qualifying matches, the coach consulted an astrologist who predicted that the Croats would reach the play-offs at the expense of the Greeks and even, allegedly, that Croatia would beat Ukraine 2-0. However, the astrologer added that Blazevic could suffer a heart attack on the bench in France this summer.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

No previous involvement.
(Formerly part of Yugoslavia)

How they qualified

EUROPEAN SECTION GROUP 1

08.10.96	Bosnia-Croatia	1-4
10.11.96	Croatia-Greece	1-1
29.03.97	Croatia-Denmark	1-1
02.04.97	Croatia-Slovenia	3-3
30.04.97	Greece-Croatia	0-1
06.09.97	Croatia-Bosnia	3-2
10.09.97	Denmark-Croatia	3-1
11.10.97	Slovenia-Croatia	1-3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark	8	5	2	1	14	6	17
***Croatia**	**8**	**4**	**3**	**1**	**17**	**12**	**15**
Greece	8	4	2	2	11	4	14
Bosnia-H'a	8	3	0	5	9	14	9
Slovenia	8	0	1	7	5	20	1

**Croatia enter play-offs*

PLAY-OFFS

29.10.97	Croatia-Ukraine	2-0
15.11.97	Ukraine-Croatia	1-1

Croatia win 3-1 on agg and qualify for finals

Players used in qualifiers

Ten appearances Boban.
Nine Boksic, Suker, Bilic, Asanovic.
Eight Jarni, Vlaovic.
Seven Ladic, Soldo, Simic, Juric.
Six Cvitanovic, Prosinecki.
Four Jerkan, Jurcic.
Three Maric, Stimac, Mrmic, Saric, Kovac.
Two Erceg, Gabric, Pralija, Stanic.
One Jurcevic, Mamic, Tudor.

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Five Suker. **Four** Boksic. **Three** Boban, Bilic.
Two Vlaovic. **One** Maric, Prosinecki, Soldo.

Riding his luck...Miroslav Blazevic

THE COACH

Miroslav BLAZEVIC
10.2.35.
A none-too- impressive player with Sarajevo, Rijeka and Sion (Switzerland) where he started his coaching career after a bad knee injury. He also coached Lausanne and Grasshopper in Switzerland, then the Swiss national team, before going to Yugoslavia – first to Rijeka, then Dinamo (FC Croatia) and Pristina. Next step was France (Nantes), then Greece (PAOK), then FC Croatia again, and he has been the national team manager since March 1994. Blazevic is a great tactician who knows how to motivate players. He is always an optimist, and acknowledges nothing but attack. When it comes to press conferences, Blazevic doesn't mince his words. He is prone to exaggeration when talking about his accomplishments, but he has achieved a lot with Croatia, even though there are experts who claim he could have done better. His statistics are 38 games, 21 wins, 11 draws, and a goal difference of 74-40.

GOALKEEPERS

Tonci GABRIC
Date of birth: 11.3.61. Club: Hajduk Split. 9 caps.
The oldest member of the team, but one of the fastest, likely to end his career in the World Cup.

Drazen LADIC
1.1.63. Croatia Zagreb. 37 caps.
Has made more appearances than any other player for the national team but in the last couple of games made some very serious errors. Excellent on the line; penalties are his speciality.

Marijan MRMIC
6.5.65. Besiktas (Tur). 9 caps.
A fireman by profession, but a very reliable goalkeeper. Modest, silent, probably the main keeper in France.

Vladimir VASILJ
6.7.75. Hrvatski Dragovoljac. Uncapped.
Could travel to France as the third keeper in spite of his inexperience. Has already signed for Croatia Zageb for next season, as Ladic's successor.

DEFENDERS

Slaven BILIC
11.9.68. Everton (Eng). 34 caps (3 gls).
One of the best players in the squad, selected by one Croatian newspaper as the best in 1997. The only player in the squad with a university degree (law), and plays guitar. Formerly with Hajduk Split and Karlsruhe in Germany. A member of the team for only two months before he was made captain.

Nicola JERKAN
8.12.64. Rapid Wien (Aut). 31 caps (1 gl).
Experienced central defender but has lost his place in the team and his peak is long over. Modest and afraid of flying.

Goran JURIC
5.2.63. Croatia Zagreb. 7 caps.
One of the new stars of the national team. Explosive, brave, commanding – and diabetic. Only weakness is in the air.

Zoran MAMIC
30.9.71. Bochum (Ger). 3 caps.
Very strong in the air and highly mobile. May miss out on the final 22 who make it to France.

Dario SIMIC
12.11.75. Croatia Zagreb. Uncapped.
Strong stopper, known as 'pit-bull' – because he owns two. Has reportedly signed for Milan, although has also been linked to Serie A champions Juventus.

Igor STIMAC
6.9.67. Derby County (Eng). 25 caps (2 gls).
Has lost his place due to problems with his back but still may have a role to play in France. Unbeatable in the jump and can play several different defensive roles. Girls love him and he has been compared with American film star Richard Gere. One of six Croatians (the others are Boban, Jarni, Pavlicic, Prosinecki and Suker) who were leading lights in the Yugoslavian Under-18 team who won the World Cup in Chile in 1987.

Mario TOKIC
23.7.75. Rijeka. Uncapped.
A symbolic selection by Blazevic who is keen to have at least one player from Rijeka in the squad. Unlikely to play in France.

Stjepan TOMAS
6.3.76. Croatia Zagreb. Uncapped.
Another political appointment – this time to placate the Croatia Zagreb management who want to see all their key players in the natonal squad.

Igor TUDOR
16.4.78. Hajduk Split. 1 cap.
Likely to be the youngest player in the squad. Very tall, mobile, with great technique. Depsite his age and inexperience, he has been praised by veteran Croatian coach Tomislav Ivic (now in charge of World Cup finalists Iran) who says Tudor combines the best of Frank Rijkaard and Marcel Desailly.

MIDFIELDERS

Aljosa ASANOVIC
14.12.65. Napoli (Ita). 35 caps (3 gls).
Experienced and popular player, left-footed, secured his place in Croatian football history as the scorer of the first goal for Croatia back in 1990, against USA in Zagreb. Played for Hajduk, Metz, Cannes and Montpellier (France), Hajduk again, Valladolid (Spain) and Derby County (England) before transferring to Italy earlier this season after failing to hold down a regular first-team place at Derby.

Zvonimir BOBAN
8.10.68. Milan (Ita). 31 caps (7 gls).
The playmaker and captain, and still very popular among players and supporters. Boban was hailed as a national hero when, during a fight between fans of Dinamo (now Croatia) Zagreb and police at a Dinamo-Red Star Belgrade League match, he defended a young fan by attacking a policeman. He was banned for six months and didn't appear for Yugoslavia in the 1990 World Cup finals.

Robert JARNI
26.10.68. Real Betis. 34 caps.
The fastest player in the squad, capable of running 100 metres in 11 seconds. Played for Yugoslavia in Italia 90. Irreplaceable as a wing-back on the left hand flank. His transfer from Hajduk Split to Italy's Bari remains unresolved as Hajduk still owe almost £1million.

Nikola JURCEVIC
14.8.66. Casino Salzburg (Aut). 19 caps (2 gls).
Strong all-round player, but not sure to get a place in the final 22.

Krunoslav JURCIC
26.11.69. Croatia Zagreb. 6 caps.
Very effective player, nicknamed Propeller. Tough and almost impassable.

Niko KOVAC
26.11.69. Bayer Leverkusen (Ger). 7 caps.
Impressive performer for Leverkusen in the Champions League, but now likely to be ruled out of France with a serious knee ligament injury.

Silvio MARIC
20.3.75. Croatia Zagreb. 3 caps (1 gl).
Gifted young player, and capable of being one of the star figures in France. Great abilities, physically imposing.

Robert PROSINECKI
12.1.69. Croatia Zagreb. 26 caps (4 gls).
Back in 1992 some even mentioned Prosinecki as the best player in the world. Has been through a crisis, but occasionally shows the brilliant form he used to demonstrate for Red Star Belgrade. Has been reborn since returning to Croatia from Spain's Sevilla last summer. Croatia's biggest-selling newspaper voted him the best player of 1997.

Zvonimir SOLDO
2.11.67. VfB Stuttgart (Ger). 23 caps (1 gl).
Very useful player both in defence and midfield. Reliable operator.

Mario STANIC
10.4.72. Parma (Ita). 13 caps (1 gl).
Former Yugoslav international who was saved from being killed during the civil strife by pure luck – his house in Sarajevo was completely destroyed. Like Asanovic has played in six countries – Yugoslavia (Zeljeznicar Sarajevo), Croatia (FC Croatia), Spain (Sporting Gijon), Portugal (Benfica), Belgium (Brugge) and Italy (Parma).

Danijel SARIC
12.11.75. Croatia Zagreb. 3 caps.
Gained his place by his exceptional performances on the right side of Croatia Zagreb's attack this season after failing to make any impact in Spain with Sporting Gjon. That was despite experts predicting a great future for him.

FORWARDS

Alen BOKSIC
31.1.70. Lazio (Ita). 23 caps. (5 gls).
One of Croatia's most gifted players but who has not fulfilled his enormous potential in national team colours. His goal in Kiev against Ukraine secured Croatia's place in France. That strike seemed to inspire him, as he has been in outstanding form ever since. Creates more goals than he scores.

Nino BULE
19.3.76. Croatia Zagreb. Uncapped.
A player for future, but not likely to find his place in the group for France.

Igor CVITANOVIC
1.11.70. Real Sociedad (Spa). 20 caps, (3 gls).
The best domestic player for a long time before leaving Croatia Zagreb this winter after becoming the first player to score more than 100 goals in the national championship.

Tomislav ERCEG
22.10.71. Ancona (Ita). 4 caps (1 gl).
Very resourceful goalgetter and top scorer at Hajduk in the past few years.

Davor SUKER
1.1.68. Real Madrid (Spa). 32 caps (26 gls).
The king of Croatian attackers, who scores in almost every match. Recently has not played well in Spain, allegedly because of his romance with a TV star. Still possesses a great awarness of space and the goal.

Goran VLAOVIC
7.8.71. Valencia (Spa). 24 caps (10 gls).
Second highest scorer in the team but often on the bench. Had a dangerous head injury but now completely recovered.

Croatian dangerman...Davor Suker

Denmark

Better, but not the best

Jim Holden on a Danish date with destiny

THE MOST remarkable aspect of Denmark's participation is that this is only their second time at the World Cup finals. Since the advent of the Danish Dynamite side in the early 1980s, the nation has been a consistently powerful force in football: European champions in 1992 and unlucky semi-finalists in 1984.

Yet their only previous World Cup tournament was back in 1986, when that fabled Dynamite side blew themselves up by losing 5-1 to Spain, having earlier thrashed Uruguay in a memorable 6-1 win and beaten eventual finalists Germany.

It is a record the current squad are desperate to improve. While nobody believes they can match the 1980s team for flair and style, there is no doubt either that the modern team have a far better collective spirit than their predecessor. They certainly won't commit soccer suicide.

The nature of their qualification proves that. In a reasonably tough group involving Croatia and Greece, the Danes always looked in control of their own destiny. Eventually they finished top thanks to a stonewall 0-0 draw in Athens in the final game, defying crowd intimidation with some aplomb.

That is one basis for the optimism in Denmark of being able to make a significant challenge in the summer.

Their first-round grouping was certainly favourable. While hosts France will be expected to finish top, the Danes firmly believe they can overcome both South Africa and Saudi Arabia. They also ended France's long unbeaten run with a 1-0 victory in a friendly 15 months ago.

Allan Nielsen, their experienced midfielder playing his club football at Tottenham Hotspur, said: "Of course we will not underestimate the opposition. I have seen South Africa on TV and they scored some impressive goals in their qualifying matches. Saudi Arabia proved in 1994 that they are a quality team as well.

"But there is a strong belief in our squad that we can put up a good showing. The longer we are together as a unit in France the better we will become. There is a great bond among the players, and excellent discipline too.

"When I saw the draw I thought that it was pretty evenly matched across the eight groups, with a couple of countries in each who should be favourites to qualify. We should be the second best in our group in terms of our recent results and FIFA ranking."

Team spirit is certainly a major factor behind successful nations. Squads in which jealousies and feuds rage, however talented the players, tend to betray themselves when crunch time arrives.

But you do need your share of world-class footballers – and Denmark believe they have those.

Most important, surely, is goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel. He has been an imposing figure throughout the 1990s to strikers all round the world, both with his club Manchester United and for the Danes.

Two exceptional saves late in the match against Greece epitomised his reputation. Denmark conceded only six goals in their qualifying campaign, where defensive security provided the platform for success.

In front of him there is an experienced backline. Sweeper Jes Hogh plays at Fenerbahce, while Marc Rieper is at Glasgow Celtic. Veteran Jan Heintze has travelled the Bundesliga for a decade, and promising Ole Tobiasen made a thrilling star at Ajax this season before a knee injury which has put his World Cup hopes in jeopardy.

Switching from the long-standing 3-5-2 formation used by his predecessors Sepp Piontek and Richard Moller Nielsen, new coach Bo Johansson has opted for a 4-4-2 system with a zonal defence. So far it has proved so good.

The other world-class players for Denmark are the Laudrup brothers; hugely talented, but prone to inconsistency.

Michael, the only survivor from the 1986 side, is enjoying an Indian summer to his career at Ajax. He is needed to provide some craft amid a hard-working midfield featuring Nielsen of Spurs and Celtic's Morten Wieghorst.

Up front, brother Brian's form is crucial. His ability to make those surging, slalom runs past a clutch of defenders can turn a match in an instant. In qualification he was often spectacularly good – and it is fair to say that this will be the biggest stage of his career.

The most difficult problem for coach Johansson is to decide on a striking partner for the younger Laudrup. He has tried six players already, including Middlesbrough's Mikkel Beck, but with no consistent success.

It is little wonder, then, that lack of goals is Denmark's fear. Just 14 scored was the lowest among the automatic qualifiers from Europe. Perhaps the wild card in this area might be Ebbe Sand, top scorer in the Danish domestic league with Brondby. He has yet to play a full international, but seems sure to be tried in some of the warm-up matches arranged against Scotland, Norway, Sweden and Cameroon.

Solve that dilemma and Johansson's team could be the dark horses of the tournament. He has lost only one match since taking over in the summer of 1996, and Denmark have been consistently in the top 10 of FIFA's world rankings.

But there is one huge cloud on the World Cup horizon that sends a shudder down the spine of all Danish fans – the spectre of playing bogey side Spain in the second round.

Nothing could be worse. In 1984 Spain beat Denmark in the semi-finals of the European Championships (played in France) on a penalty shoot-out. In 1986, they knocked the Danes out of the World Cup with that infamous 5-1 win.

In the 1988 European Championships, the Spanish won again, 3-2, in the group stage. And in the qualifying tournament for the 1994 World Cup, a 10-man Spain overcame Denmark 1-0 in the final game to prevent them reaching from the USA finals.

Denmark and Spain are paired again for the second round stage in France, so another clash is a distinct possibility. But nobody wants to talk about it.

When Nielsen was asked about the prospect, he said: "We can't think about unknown opponents. But let's say that we feel we are good enough to reach the quarter-finals."

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 Did not enter;
1934 Did not enter;
1938 Did not enter;
1950 Did not enter;
1954 Did not enter;
1958 Did not qualify;
1962 Did not qualify;
1966 Did not qualify;
1970 Did not qualify;
1974 Did not qualify;
1978 Did not qualify;
1982 Did not qualify;
1986 2nd round;
1990 Did not qualify;
1994 Did not qualify.
Total games Played 4 Won 3 Drawn 0 Lost 1 Goals for 10 Goals against 6.

How they qualified

EUROPEAN SECTION GROUP 1

01.09.96	Slovenia-Denmark	0-2
09.10.96	Denmark-Greece	2-1
29.03.97	Croatia-Denmark	1-1
30.04.97	Denmark-Slovenia	4-0
08.06.97	Denmark-Bosnia	2-0
20.08.97	Bosnia-Denmark	3-0
10.09.97	Denmark-Croatia	3-1
11.10.97	Greece-Denmark	0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
***Denmark**	**8**	**5**	**2**	**1**	**14**	**6**	**17**
Croatia	8	4	3	1	17	12	15
Greece	8	4	2	2	11	4	14
Bosnia-H'a	8	3	0	5	9	14	9
Slovenia	8	0	1	7	5	20	1

*qualifed for finals as group winners

Players used in qualifiers

Eight appearances Helveg, Hogh, A Nielsen, Schmeichel.
Seven B Laudrup, Schonberg.
Six Heintze, Laursen, Thomsen.
Five Rieper.
Four Frandsen, M Laudrup, Moller, Molnar, Tomasson.
Three Beck, Pedersen.
Two So Andersen, Colding, Goldback, Tobiasen, Wieghorst.
One Bisgaard, Bjur, Friis-Hansen, B S Nielsen, P Nielsen.

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Four B Laudrup.
Three A Nielsen.
Two Molnar.
One M Laudrup, Pedersen, Schjonberg, Rieper.

Popular choice…coach Bo Johansson

THE COACH

Bo JOHANSSON

Age 54, Record: Played 10, won 7, drawn 2, lost 1.

Has proved a hugely popular choice since replacing Richard Moller Nielsen after Euro 96. Has switched the tactics to 4-4-2, and brought a fresh smile to the face of the squad who had grown weary under the previous regime. Easily overcame the fact he is a native of Sweden, Denmark's oldest and fiercest rivals, after victory 1-0 away to the Swedes in his first match in charge. A superb record of only one defeat, even if some performances have been less than inspired, has bolstered confidence. He had previously coached unsung Silkeborg to their first Danish league title.

GOALKEEPERS

Erik BOYE

Date of birth: 7.2.64. Club: Vejle. Uncapped.

Consistently excellent performances with Vejle won him with the goalkeeper of the year title in Denmark for 1997. It could just bring a surprise trip to the World Cup, too, ahead of rivals such as Silkeborg's Peter Kjaer and Odense Lars Hogh.

Mogens KROGH

31.10.63. Brondby. 5 caps.

Has been a faithful understudy to Schmeichel, both at Brondby and national level. Reliable keeper whose desire to play in the Premier League has never materialised. Vociferous spokesman for the Danish players' union.

Peter SCHMEICHEL

18.11.63. Manchester Utd (Eng). 97 caps.

Simply the best. The giant goalkeeper will have reached 100 caps by the World Cup, and may be a European club champion with Manchester United. Brilliant shot-stopper and gigantic presence. Sometimes team captain too in the absence of Michael Laudrup.

DEFENDERS

Soren COLDING

2.9.72. Brondby. 2 caps.

Another versatile performer, whose class has been a major factor in Brondby's recent domination of the Danish domestic scene. Played as Denmark's representative in the gala match in Marseille before the World Cup draw.

Thomas GRAVESEN

11.3.76. Hamburg. Uncapped.

Part of the new wave of Danish talent, an all-rounder whose preferred position is as a defensive midfielder. Loves to be in the thick of the action. Left Vejle for Hamburg in a £600,000 move last summer.

Jan HEINTZE

17.8.63. Bayer Leverskusen (Ger). 35 caps (1 gl).

On the fringes back in 1986, and after several years in the wilderness in the Richard Moller Nielsen era, this attack-minded full-back has returned for an Indian summer. Played for several top clubs, including PSV Eindhoven.

Thomas HELVEG

24.6.71. Udinese (Ita). 26 caps (1 gl).

Tough full-back who has enjoyed a stirring season with surprise packet Udinese in Serie A. Virtually ever-present in Johansson's reign and and a key component in the side. Versatile enough to play in midfield too.

Jes HOGH

7.5.66. Fenerbahce (Tur). 34 caps (1 gl).

Highly-experienced defender who plays with skill and patience for Fenerbahce in Turkey. Has adapted well to the zonal defence system after many years as the libero. A quiet man off the pitch, but authoritative where it matters.

Jacob LAURSEN

6.10.71. Derby County (Eng). 20 caps.

Proved a popular, spirited defender at Derby County. Can fulfil a man-marking role, or play anywhere along the back four. Injury lost him a place in the team, but don't bank against his returning for France.

Marc RIEPER

5.6.68. Celtic (Sco). 49 caps (1 gl).

Has been the rock of Denmark's defence since becoming a regular six years ago. The 6ft 3ins stopper provides height and strength, bolstered by his time at West Ham and now Glasgow Celtic.

Ole TOBIASEN

8.7.75. Ajax Amsterdam (Hol). 2 caps.

Young full-back who joined Ajax from Heerenveen last summer, making an immediate impact with his cultured style. A cruel knee ligament injury makes him touch and go for France, but he would now be first choice if fit.

MIDFIELDERS

Ole BJUR

13.9.68. Brondby. 3 caps (1 gl).

Scored on his debut in coach Johansson's first match in charge, away to Sweden. Since then the Brondby midfield grafter's opportunities have been limited, but solid club performances keep him in the international frame. Has now played more than 250 League games in Denmark.

Per FRANDSEN

6.2.70. Bolton Wanderers (Eng). 8 caps.

Bustling midfielder with efficient technique, who played in the majority of qualifiers. Has performed reliably for Bolton Wanderers in the Premiership, and four years at Lille earlier in his career may be helpful this summer.

Bjarne GOLDBAEK

6.10.68. FC Kopenhagen. 10 caps.

Another battling midfielder who is on the fringe of making the trip to France. Much-travelled player who seems to yo-yo to and from the Bundesliga where he has had spells with Schalke, Kaiserslautern and Cologne. Linked with a move to Bolton recently from Copenhagen.

Allan NIELSEN

13.3.71. Tottenham Hotspur. 14 caps (5 gls).

Vital part of Johansson's planning, particularly as a goalscoring midfielder. Revitalised by the appointment of Christian Gross as manager at Spurs, after a long spell on the substitute's bench under Gerry Francis. Scored within 60 seconds of his international debut.

Michael SCHJONBERG

19.1.67. Kaiserslautern (Ger). 24 caps (3 gls)

In his second spell in Germany with Kaiserslautern, he has become an integral part of the new side on the left of midfield. Another tidy player, who used to work as a fishing-net repairer and mended the broken goal nets at former club OB Odense.

Morten WIEGHORST

25.2.71. Celtic. 7 caps (2 gls).

Understudy to Frandsen in the holding role in midfield. Strong competitor who has benefited from a move to Glasgow Celtic this season. Impressed in the final qualifying match against Greece when Frandsen was suspended.

Michael LAUDRUP

15.6.64. Ajax Amsterdam (Hol). 95 caps (36 gls).

Should celebrate his 100th cap during the World Cup. Only survivor of '86, and enjoying final phase of distinguished club career at Ajax. Also played for Juventus, Barcelona and Real Madrid. Captain of the team, and must bury his tendency to disappoint if Denmark are to flourish.

Jon Dahl TOMASSON

29.8.76. Newcastle Utd (Eng). 4 caps.

Wonder-kid who has struggled amid the decline of Newcastle, whom he joined last summer from Heerenveen in preference to Barcelona and Ajax. Sure to come good, and although a quiet man has the talent and determination to play a role in the summer.

FORWARDS

Erik Bo ANDERSEN

14.11.70. OB Odense. 8 caps.

Appeared to be out of the frame after struggling at Glasgow Rangers following Euro 96. But a move back to OB Odense has re-invigorated this tall, rangy striker. Three goals in five games before the winter break is a good basis to build his case on during the Spring.

Mikkel BECK

12.5.73. Middlesbrough (Eng). 14 caps (3 gls).

In the same bracket as Molnar; willing, hard-working, promising, but not yet the real thing. Started to score goals regularly at Middlesbrough, but only in the English First Division. Likely to feature more as a substitute than in the starting line-up.

Brian LAUDRUP

22.2.69. Rangers (Sco). 73 caps (18 gls).

Certain choice, a player of dazzling individual skill, whose ability to dribble into the box can unhinge the best teams. Top scorer in the qualifiers with four goals. Currently at Glasgow Rangers, but set to leave in the summer and join Ajax, Chelsea or Manchester United, while 20 others are chasing. Enough said.

Peter MOLLER

23.3.72. PSV Eindhoven (Hol). 9 caps (1 gl).

Another former top scorer in the Danish League, but left Brondby for PSV last Autumn. One League goal since going to Holland has severely hampered his hopes of playing a major World Cup role.

Miklos MOLNAR

10.4.70. Sevilla (Spa). 8 caps (2 gls).

Was Laudrup's strike partner in the last match in Greece, and scored a couple of goals in Group One. Unsettled at his Spanish Second Division club Seville, having been top scorer in the Danish Superliga last season with unsung Lyngby. Powerful forward, but still to prove his international class.

Per PEDERSEN

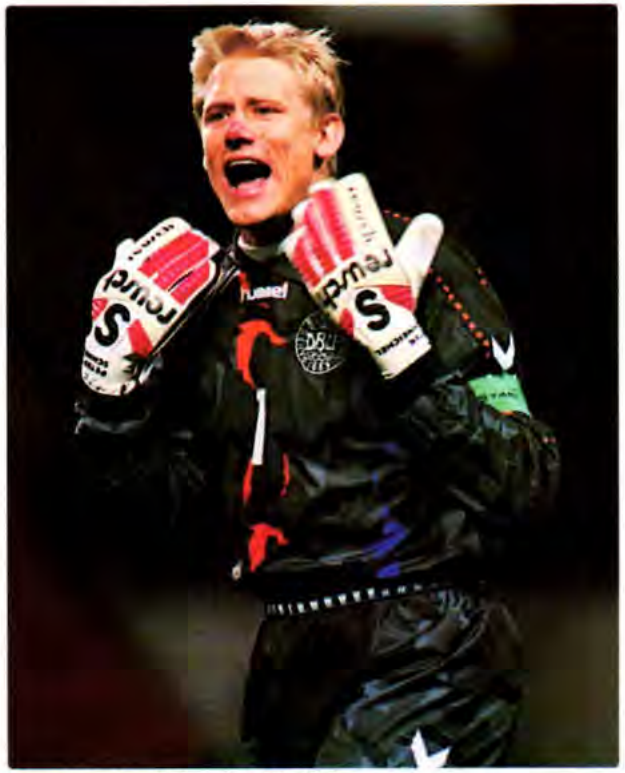
30.3.69. Borussia Monchengladbach (Ger). 6 caps (2 gls).

Made a dynamic start to his international career with four goals against the USA, but the failure of his move to Blackburn Rovers was a major setback. Scored his first goal for new club Monchengladbach just before Christmas, but faces a tough battle to make it to France.

Ebbe SAND

19.7.72. Brondby. Uncapped.

The current hot property in Danish soccer, top of the goal charts at the midway winter break with 19 in 18 games for Brondby. Gifted striker, who has taken his chance following Moller's departure. Yet to play for Denmark, but that will change soon.



Fearsome reputation…Goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel

England

A strong case for caution

United's success could cause a problem, says Gavin Hamilton

IN PREPARING for this summer's World Cup, England manager Glenn Hoddle's main concern has been to dampen down the euphoria that greeted his team's qualification for France 98.

If you believe the hype, England are world-beaters. If you believe the hype, England's first-round group opponents will roll over without any hint of a struggle. If you believe the hype, only Brazil stand between England and World Cup glory.

Much of the excitement surrounding England's prospects is understandable. The manner of the team's qualification, coming on the back of reaching the semi-finals of Euro 96 under Terry Venables, was impressive. There were vital away victories in Poland, Moldova and Georgia, the sort of places where Graham Taylor's men failed on the road to USA 94. Then there was the decisive result in Rome, goalless but priceless, which condemned the Italians to the play-offs.

Hoddle has developed the technical work done by his predecessor Venables (who had repaired much of the damage done by his predecessor Taylor). He has also benefited from the continued success of Manchester United.

Just as Alex Ferguson's United side grow in stature with every Champions League victory, so Hoddle's young charges seem to improve with every game. That's because, more often than not, they are one and the same. United now dominate the English game in much the same way that Liverpool were omnipresent in the 1970s and 1980s. But where Liverpool had a fair sprinkling of Scots, Welsh and Irish in the ranks, United's key men (Ryan Giggs and Peter Schmeichel excepted) are English.

The mood of optimism has increased further with Alan Shearer's return from serious injury. The form and fitness of the Newcastle striker between now and the summer will be crucial, not least because of his pedigree – Shearer is the sort of world-class finisher that rivals such as France and Spain lack.

But let's not get too carried away. There is a strong case for caution.

Under Hoddle, England have been impressively consistent rather than consistently impressive. Much of that is down to the 3-5-2 playing system, which players are familiar with and which has not been tinkered with unnecessarily.

The formation has its critics. Hoddle's use of wing-backs, where Venables preferred wingers, opens the coach up to the criticism that the team lacks attacking penetration. Wing-backs rarely deliver the sort of crosses or attacking infield runs of wingers. And with Hoddle preferring to play Paul Ince and David Batty (both defensive-minded midfielders), Shearer, Teddy Sheringham and Paul Gascoigne will be the main source of goals.

Gascoigne remains the great enigma. All the signs are that Hoddle will stick by him even though Gazza rarely lasts 90 minutes these days. At Euro 96, Venables managed to get the best from Gascoigne by encouraging him to be more economical with his runs. Two years down the line, Gascoigne is determined to be involved in what will probably be his last major tournament, but will he have the legs for the fight?

If Gazza doesn't last the pace, the Manchester United connection is sure to benefit. David Beckham was played at right wing-back in the qualifiers, where he was able to employ to his trademark diagonal crossfield pass. But there is a strong case for Beckham to be used in a more central role. If Hoddle decides against that, the stage could be set for Paul Scholes to make a dramatic impact. Scholes has made slow but steady progress at Old Trafford and clearly has the nerve for the big occasion.

Ironically, Manchester United's success this season could be England's undoing. If United go one better than last year and reach the Champions League Final, almost half of the national team's key players will be involved in the most tiring club commitment of the season barely a fortnight before the World Cup kicks off.

Fitness will be a increasingly important factor from the second round onwards, assuming England make it through their group. They will be based in Britanny, just as they were during last summer's Tournoi, and will need a win against Tunisia in their opening match in Marseille to avoid a desparate bunfight with Colombia and Tunisia.

Croatia and Argentina are the most likely oppponents after the group stages, with familiar foes Germany a potential problem in the quarter-finals (anyone for penalties?). Hoddle's record against stronger opposition is at best half-decent. Against Italy it is won one, drawn one, lost one; Brazil, the biggest test of all, were 1-0 winners in Paris last summer; and France were beaten by the same scoreline thanks to Alan Shearer's opportunism.

So the warning signs are there and Hoddle will be keen to dampen down the inevitable enthusiasm as he ponders his options for France.

David Seaman is the clear first-choice goalkeeper, while Tim Flowers and Nigel Martyn are likely to edge out the claims of Ian Walker and David James.

In defence, Sol Campbell, Tony Adams and Gary Neville are the preferred centre-backs, with Graeme Le Saux the first-choice left wing-back. Gareth Southgate and Gary Pallister will provide central defensive cover, and Phil Neville can fill in on either flank. Outsiders for a squad spot include Stuart Pearce and Steve Watson of Newcastle, Liverpool's Dominic Matteo and Martin Keown (Arsenal). West Ham teenager Rio Ferdinand may be tried out between now and the summer, but must be considered a gamble for France.

In midfield, Gascoigne, Beckham and Ince seem guaranteed places, while Batty, Butt and Scholes will be pretty confident of inclusion. Which leaves Steve McManaman, Jamie Redknapp, Robert Lee (Newcastle) and Andy Hinchcliffe (Everton) competing for the remaining midfield berth.

Of the forwards, only Shearer and Sheringham are sure of their places. Robbie Fowler, Les Ferdinand and Ian Wright have all suffered losses of form or injuries this season, so the in-form Andy Cole, Michael Owen and Blackburn's Chris Sutton should not be ignored.

Hoddle is already trying to put the brakes on the 'Owen for England' bandwagon. The friendlies arranged against Chile, Switzerland, Portugal and Saudi Arabia at Wembley, and the four-nation tournament in Morocco, should give us greater insight into the coach's thoughts.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 Did not enter; **1934** Did not enter; **1938** Did not enter; **1950** 1st round; **1954** Quarter-finals; **1958** 1st round; **1962** Quarter-finals; **1966** Winners; **1970** Quarter-finals; **1974** Did not qualify; **1978** Did not qualify; **1982** 2nd round; **1986** Quarter-finals; **1990** Semi-finals; **1994** Did not qualify.
Total games played 41, won 18, drawn 12, lost 11, goals for 55, goals against 38.

How they qualified

EUROPE GROUP 2

01.09.96 .....Moldova-England 0-3
09.10.96 .....England-Poland 2-1
09.11.96 .....Georgia-England 0-2
12.02.97 .....England-Italy 0-1
30.04.97 .....England-Georgia 2-0
31.05.97 .....Poland-England 0-2
10.09.97 .....England-Moldova 4-0
11.10.97 .....Italy-England 0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
***England**	**8**	**6**	**1**	**1**	**15**	**2**	**19**
Italy	8	5	3	0	11	1	18
Poland	8	3	1	4	10	12	10
Georgia	8	3	1	4	7	9	10
Moldova	8	0	0	8	2	21	0

**England qualify for finals*

Players used in qualifiers

Eight appearances Beckham.
Seven Batty, Ince, Seaman, Southgate.
Six Campbell, Gascoigne, G Neville.
Five Shearer.
Four Ferdinand, Le Saux, Sheringham, Wright.
Three Adams, Hinchcliffe, Pearce.
Two Butt, Lee, Le Tissier, McManaman, P Neville, Pallister.
One Barmby, Collymore, Merson, Redknapp, Ripley, Scholes, Walker..

Scorers in qualifiers

Five Shearer. **Three** Sheringham. **Two** Gascoigne, Wright. **One** Ferdinand, Barmby, Scholes.

PROFILES

So far so good...Glenn Hoddle

The Coach

Glenn HODDLE
27.10.57.
Took over from Terry Venables after Euro 96. Gifted midfielder for England (53 caps but should have been 100), Tottenham and Monaco. FA Cup winner with Spurs, twice, and French League champion with Monaco under coach Arsene Wenger, who persuaded Hoddle to take up coaching. As a coach, took Swindon to the Premier League via the play-offs and Chelsea to the FA Cup Final.

GOALKEEPERS

Tim FLOWERS
Date of birth: 3.2.67. Club: Blackburn Rovers. 8 caps.
Solid performer whose form for Roy Hodgson's resurgent Rovers this season has brought a return to favour.

David SEAMAN
19.11.63. Arsenal. 37 caps.
Calm, unflappable and an inspiring presence for defenders. Injuries have affected his form over the past year but he remains Hoddle's number one choice. Ever-present at Euro 96. Joined Arsenal from QPR for £1.3million in May 1990.

Nigel MARTYN
11.8.66. Leeds Utd. 4 caps.
Cornish-born keeper whose form for Leeds should give him the third spot ahead of Liverpool's David James and Tottenham's Ian Walker. Britain's first million-pound goalkeeper when he moved from Bristol Rovers to Crystal Palace in 1989.

DEFENDERS

Tony ADAMS
10.10.66. Arsenal. 47 caps (4 gls).
Former England captain who has overcome personal problems (alcoholism) but still needs to prove his fitness to do himself justice in France. Has said he may quit if he cannot. Made his League debut for Arsenal at 17 and England debut at 21. The cornerstone of an Arsenal defence which won a host of honours (2 Leagues, 2 League Cups, the FA Cup and Cup-winners Cup) under George Graham but whose days look numbered under Arsene Wenger.

Sol CAMPBELL
18.9.74. Tottenham. 10 caps.
Powerful young central defender whose reputation grows with every cap. Automatic choice on the left side of Hoddle's three-man defence but has played for Spurs as full-back, midfielder and centre-forward. The best thing about Spurs' dismal season and likened by Hoddle to Marcel Desailly.

Rio FERDINAND
7.11.78. West Ham Utd. 1 cap.
Cousin of striker Les who impressed in his debut against Cameroon. Very young but definitely in Hoddle's thoughts as a sweeper in the long-term, despite a recent brush with the law over drink-driving.

Graeme LE SAUX
17.4.68. Chelsea. 20 caps (1 gl).
Former winger converted to full-back by Kenny Dalglish at Blackburn. Rejoined Chelsea earlier this season for £5m and quickly took to the role of left wing-back in Ruud Gullit's side. Stronger going forward than defensively.

Gary NEVILLE
18.2.75. Manchester Utd. 23 caps.
Likely to play in central defence for Hoddle but is just as happy at right-back, the position he plays for United.

Philip NEVILLE
21.1.77. Manchester Utd. 7 caps.
Younger of the two United brothers and considered by many to be the better long-term prospect. A left full-back who has been likened to Christian Ziege, but is comfortable on either flank.

Gary PALLISTER
30.6.65. Manchester Utd. 22 caps.
Solid and dependable centre-back and a title-winner four times in the last five years with United. Signed from Middlesbrough in 1989 for £2.3m.

Gareth SOUTHGATE
3.9.70. Aston Villa. 20 caps.
Former Crystal Palace midfielder converted to central defence by Brian Little at Villa. Now recovered from the loss of form following the penalty miss in the Euro 96 semi-final against Germany.

MIDFIELDERS

David BATTY
2.12.68. Newcastle Utd. 26 caps.
Tough-tackling midfield enforcer who rarely gets among the goals but rarely shirks responsibility. A League title-winner with previous clubs Leeds and Blackburn.

David BECKHAM
2.5.75. Manchester Utd. 10 caps.
Glamour boy who burst on to the scene at the start of the 1996-97 season with a spectacular lobbed goal against Wimbledon. An exceptional talent, Posh Spice or no Posh Spice, who many feel should be given more of a central role than the right wing-back position he occupied in the France 98 qualifiers.

Nicky BUTT
21.1.75. Manchester Utd. 3 caps.
Another United starlet who has filled the injured Roy Keane's boots admirably this season at Old Trafford. If his form for United continues it will be hard for Hoddle to ignore him.

Paul GASCOIGNE
27.5.67. Rangers (Sco). 52 caps (10 gls).
The great enigma. The most gifted footballer of his generation, brilliant one minute, foolish and reckless the next. Hoddle has shown faith in Gazza where others would have given up, and has been rewarded with some exceptional displays. However, doubts remain as to whether he can last the pace of what seems sure to be his last major tournament. Now winning silverware regularly with Rangers after injury-hit spells at Spurs and Lazio.

Paul INCE
21.10.67. Liverpool. 33 caps (2 gls).
Self-styled 'Guvnor' and sometime captain who grew in stature during two years in Milan with Inter after winning the League twice with Manchester United. Has not has the impact with Liverpool many predicted since his return from Italy but he remains the driving force in England's midfield. Hoddle rates him so highly that he placed Ince in his top three in the FIFA World Player voting.

Steve McMANAMAN
2.2.72. Liverpool. 18 caps.
Winger who is not the first-choice under Hoddle that he was under Venables. If his current form continues, however, the coach may be forced into a rethink. Nearly joined Barcelona last summer and has yet to sign a new contract with Liverpool.

Jamie REDKNAPP
25.6.73. Liverpool. 8 caps.
Broke an ankle playing against South Africa last summer and has yet to force his way back into Hoddle's plans. A clever passer of the ball who may end up as a sweeper. Kenny Dalglish's last signing for Liverpool, from Bournemouth in January 1991 for £350,000. Son of West Ham manager Harry.

Paul SCHOLES
16.11.74. Manchester Utd. 4 caps (2 gls).
The revelation of last summer's Tournoi who has further impressed with his performances in this season's Champions League. Moved quietly through the ranks at Old Trafford, in the shadow of Eric Cantona and without the adulation afforded to the likes of Giggs and Beckham, but he could play a crucial role for England this summer.

FORWARDS

Andy COLE
15.11.71. Manchester Utd. 2 caps.
Instinctive finisher now finally repaying the £6million United paid Newcastle in 1995. Needs confidence to play well, and as such is virtually an unknown quantity at international level. Signed for Newcastle by Kevin Keegan from Bristol City in 1993 after failing to make the grade at Arsenal and has recovered well from a hesitant start at United.

Les FERDINAND
8.12.66. Tottenham. 14 caps (5 gls).
Tall, strong target man with questionable first touch but reasonable international experience. Has struggled with injuries since joining Spurs from Newcastle.

Robbie FOWLER
9.4.75. Liverpool. 6 caps (1 gl).
His goals have carried Liverpool in recent seasons, even though he is still only 22, but has suffered with the emergence of Michael Owen at Anfield this season and has not progressed as well as expected.

Michael OWEN
14.12.79. Liverpool. Uncapped.
The sensation of the English season, an exceptional talent who has kept Karlheinz Riedle out of Liverpool's first team. Still very young but may travel to France for the experience. Warned about the need for professionalism by Hoddle, perhaps in a bid to halt the growing 'Owen for England' bandwagon.

Alan SHEARER
13.8.70. Newcastle Utd. 35 caps (16 gls).
The main man, on whose form and fitness so much depends. A world-class finisher, mature (25 going on 50) and Hoddle's preferred captain. Joined home-town club Newcastle for a world-record £15million in July 1996, but was out for almost six months (August 1997-January 1998) with a serious ankle injury. The Premier League's leading scorer three years in a row who won the League title with Blackburn in 1995, after starting out with Southampton.

Teddy SHERINGHAM
2.4.66. Manchester Utd. 28 caps (8 gls).
Former Millwall, Nottingham Forest and Tottenham striker and first choice as partner for Shearer. Reputation has grown during his first season for United and his first playing European football. Never the quickest of players and not getting any faster, but a clever foil for Shearer.

Ian WRIGHT
3.11.63. Arsenal. 28 caps (9 gls).
Irrepressible hitman whose form, ironically, has suffered since he broke Cliff Bastin's all-time Arsenal scoring record last autumn, leading Arsene Wenger to complain that criticism of 34-year-old Wright was like "looking for Miss World's first wrinkles". A latecomer to football who made his League debut for Crystal Palace aged 22.

A man with a weight on his back...Alan Shearer

France

Embarrassment of riches

The talent is there, says Andre Duclos, but can Aime Jacquet find the right mix?

CAN FRANCE score goals? That is surely the $64,000 question as the World Cup finals approach. Home advantage is of course of huge significance. True it was of limited help the last time France staged the finals, in 1938; Italy, the eventual winners, blew them away. But in 1984, when France put on the European Championship, win Platini and co. did. Even if they did make surprisingly heavy weather of defeating a Spanish team devoid of two key players in the Parisian Final.

On the face of it, this French team under Aime Jacquet has easily enough talent to make substantial progress; it should be no excessive problem at least to come through the initial group. But the Euro 96 experience was a chastening one. France expected to do so much better. After all, the team came to England after a very long unbeaten run. And then? Anticlimax, even though it was only in the end a missed penalty which put France out.

So are the parts greater than the whole? Can effective strikers be found? We plainly have to forget the volatile Patrice Loko, who has been in and out of the Paris Saint-Germain team after his mental breakdown and is still evidently vulnerable psychologically.

Can the Monaco prodigy Thierry Henry make the big step from club to international football? Both he and another interesting candidate, Auxerre's Guivarc'h, were on parade against South Africa. That disappointingly 2-1 win in Lens last October was decided only after 83 minutes by Ibrahim Ba who, perhaps significantly, had been on for just five minutes as a substitute for Youri Djorkaeff.

There is no doubt at all of Djorkaeff's great talents, but it does seem at times as if Aime Jacquet doesn't fully believe in him. He can as we know operate just behind the front runners or as one of them, himself. He has scored some fine goals for Internazionale, this season.

Djorkaeff has had, as we know, an exceptional partnership and understanding with Juventus's Zinedine Zidane. But this has been a strangely erratic season for Zidane. Indeed at the turn of the year there was so much concern over his form that questions were asked which, not surprisingly, he found difficult to answer. But he did shrug off the suggestion that – having said the World Cup was his chief preoccupation – he had not been giving club football his all. Could it be however that this, unconsciously, the case? Zidane suddenly came to life after a rather drab beginning in the European Cup game against Manchester United in Turin. But he warmed up and later produced moments of astonishing skill. On form he can be the new Platini of this French team.

Then, still in Italy, there is the defender so much admired by Glenn Hoddle, Lilian Thuram. Now operating at right-back, Thuram has power, skill and a marked positional sense. And for the left position Lizarazu is a formidable competitor, eager and able to go forward.

Didier Deschamps may have been dismissed as a "water carrier" by an arrogant Eric Cantona, but he might well reply, so was Rudyard Kipling's Gunga Din. Deschamps is an unpretentious figure on and off the field, but he is of colossal value to any team he plays for, a decisive tackler, a good distributor.

Alain Boghossian is a hot candidate for midfield; and he too of course is playing in Italy, having been there since 1994, when he joined Napoli from Marseille. Now at Sampdoria, he has been in increasingly commanding and adventurous form.

Of course there are high hopes of one of the season's outstanding young players, David Trezeguet, still only 20 years old, and banging them in for Monaco, linking happily with Thierry Henry. Trezeguet, born in France but very much the product of Argentinian football, having gone back to his pro footballer father's native country as a toddler, might just be the French answer up front.

So as you see there is plenty of potential talent among forwards for Jacquet to choose from; Christophe Dugarry being yet another. For a couple of seasons he had been one of European football's main malcontents, bitterly frustrated at Milan where he hardly ever played, little happier at Barcelona where, after early season omission, he had a disagreement with the Dutch manager, Van Gaal; though he did eventually win a first team place and did especially well against Newcastle in the Champions League.

Now, however, he is back in France with Marseille. He showed in the Tournoi de France last summer, not least against England, how dangerous he can be in the air.

Then there is the ever promising Florian Maurice, now with Paris Saint Germain, and Michael Madar, a talented centre forward who at last came out of Spanish mothballs at La Coruna, when he joined Everton, has not abandoned his World Cup ambitions.

An embarrassment of riches, you might say, in that old French phrase. But time gallops on, France have only friendlies to play, and so many possible permutations that Aime Jacquet will not find it easy to decide on what strike force he needs and wants.

The defence looks pretty sound. Laurent Blanc, most elegant and cool of sweepers, back in France now after extensive European travels, has massive experience and looks as serviceable as ever. Marcel Desailly would always rather play in midfield, but he's a very hard man to pass in central defence. And now, after his enervating stand-off almost half the season with Sampdoria, Christian Karembeu has been released to play for Real Madrid, which gives Jacquet a potential trump card in midfield.

Ibrahim Ba can be an electrically exciting force on the right wing, as he showed in the Tournoi de France, a true winger with all the pace, swerve, footwork and enterprise this classically implies, and which is all too seldom found nowadays. It is to be hoped Jacquet will use him, not least because full-backs today so rarely come up against the real thing in terms of wingers, and are inclined to find them difficult to deal with. Nor can the claims of Pires, the main force in the attack of a Metz team which has set such a blistering pace in the Championship, be forgotten.

The going of Bernard Lama, in goal, has been no help. Until his stupid indulgence in prohibited substances, he had been a regular fixture in goal, and it has been difficult to replace him. Nor was his sudden signing for West Ham, who already had two sound goalkeepers even if one of them was injured, been the best possible move.

As you can see, while the outfield defence seems strong, there are so manmy imponderables about the French team. A Zidane on form could make all the difference. But for whom would he be making the bullets to fire?

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 1st round; **1934** 1st round; **1938** 2nd round; **1950** Did not qualify; **1954** 1st round; **1958** Semi-finalists; **1962** Did not qualify; **1966** 1st round; **1970** Did not qualify; **1974** Did not qualify; **1978** 1st round; **1982** Semi-finalists/4th place; **1986** Semi-finalists/3rd place; **1990** Did not qualify; **1994** Did not qualify.
Total games played 34, won 15, drawn 5, lost 5, goals for 71, goals against 56

Games since Euro 96

31.8.96	France-Mexico	2-0
9.10.96	France-Turkey	4-0
9.11.96	Denmark-France	1-0
22.1.97	Portugal-France	0-2
26.2.97	France-Holland	2-1
2.4.97	France-Sweden	1-0
3.6.97	France-Brazil	1-1
7.6.97	France-England	0-1
11.6.97	France-Italy	2-2
11.10.97	France-South Africa	2-1
12.11.97	France-Scotland	2-1

Players used since Euro 96

Nine appearances Thuram, Zidane.
Seven Blanc, Desailly, Deschamps, Djorkaeff, Karembeu, Loko.
Six Barthez, Pires.
Five Ba, Candela, Dugarry, Lizarazu, Ngotty, Vieira.
Four Keller, Laigle.
Three Lama, Maurice, Pedros.
Two Blondeau, Djetou, Gava, Loboeuf, Lamouchi, Ouedec.
One Charbonnier, Goma, Guerin, Makelele, Martins.

Goalscorers since Euro 96

Five Djorkaeff.
One Ba, Blanc, Deschamps, Keller, Laigle, Loko, Ouedec, Pedros, Pires, Zidane.

Plenty of options...Aime Jacquet

THE COACH

Aime JACQUET
27.9.41.
Played in midfield for Lyon and Saint-Etienne and twice for France, though he was a steady league player rather than an international-class performer. Learned the coaching trade as pupil to masters such as Albert Batteux and Jean Snella, then developed his own reputation at Lyon, Bordeaux and Montpellier. He was appointed as France manager in January 1994 as successor to Gerard Houllier. Says he does not intend to stay on as national coach beyond the World Cup finals.

GOALKEEPERS

Fabien BARTHEZ
Date of birth: 28.6.71. Club: Monaco. 9 caps.
Forced his way into Marseille's team in their 1992-93 Champions Cup-winning season and created his own 'soccer fashion' with his short-sleeved goalkeeping shirts. Moved to Monaco in 1995. His one fumble of the game cost France their match against England in Le Tournoi when he dropped a cross and Alan Shearer scored the late, only goal.

Lionel CHARBONNIER
25.10.66. Auxerre. 1 cap.
Made his debut in the 2-2 draw against Italy last summer and has now edged up to No 2 behind Barthez.

Bernard LAMA
7.4.63. West Ham Utd (Eng). 35 caps.
A year ago Lama would have considered a certainty to be keeping goal at the World Cup. Suspended after failing a dope test for marijuana and fell out with PSG. Did not play at all last autumn and now unable to get into West Ham's first team.

Lionel LETIZI
28.5.73. Metz. 2 caps.
Debut against South Africa. Called up initially because of the absence of Lama.

DEFENDERS

Laurent BLANC
19.11.65. Marseille. 63 caps (11 gls).
Tall, dominating, sweeper or occasional midfielder who was 1990 Footballer of the Year. Made his name with Montpellier where he was even once their 14-goal top scorer. Joined Napoli after the 1992 European Championships but stayed little more than a year, being too adventurous for the Italians' liking. Played for Nimes, Saint-Etienne and Auxerre, helped Barcelona win the Cup-winners Cup last season and then returned home with Marseille.

Marcel DESAILLY
7.9.68. Milan (Ita). 37 caps (1 gl).
Born in Accra, Ghana, but made his initial steps in the game by playing 164 League games for Nantes before joining Marseille in 1992. He so impressed Milan, in helping Marseille beat them in the 1993 Champions Cup Final, that the Italian club snapped him up the following autumn. Then became the first player to win the Champions Cup with different clubs in successive seasons.

Vincent CANDELA
24.10.73. Roma (Ita). 7 caps.
Made his top division debut as a 20-year-old in 1993 for Toulouse. Transferred to Guingamp for two seasons before joining Roma in January last year.

Frank LEBOEUF
22.1.68. Chelsea (Eng). 11 caps (2 gls).
Made his France debut in a 0-0 draw with Norway in 1995. Leboeuf then scored both his international goals in a 10-0 European Championship thrashing of Azerbaijan. Joined Chelsea in the summer of 1996 and has been an enormous success.

Bixente LIZARAZU
9.12.69. Bayern Munich (Ger). 30 caps (1 gl).
Can play orthodox defender but prefers left wing-back and likes to have a crack at goal. Joined Bayern, with whom he hopes to win the Champions League, from Athletic Bilbao last year.

Bruno N'GOTTY
10.6.71. Paris Saint-Germain. 6 caps.
Tough central defender with a powerful shot – such as the one which brought the goal with which Paris Saint-Germain defeated Rapid Vienna to win the 1996 Cup-winners Cup.

Lilian THURAM
1.1.72. Parma (Ita). 27 caps.
Voted the best defender in Serie A last season. Can play in the centre of defence or as a defensive midfield but Jacquet appears to prefer him as a right-back.

MIDFIELDERS

Ibrahim BA
12.1.73. Milan (Ita). 7 caps (2 gls).
Winger who was courted for most of last spring by Arsenal but opted to join Milan. France's star of last summer's Tournoi.

Alain BOGHOSSIAN
27.10.70. Sampdoria (Ita). 2 caps.
Surprised everyone when Napoli took him to Italy three seasons ago. Transferred to Sampdoria at the start of this season.

Didier DESCHAMPS
15.10.68. Juventus (Ita). 63 caps (4 gls).
Began with his home-town club of Bayonne and moved into the top French division with Nantes and Marseille. Captain of Marseille team who won the Champions Cup amid controversy in 1993. Joined Juventus the following year and was midfield general in their Champions Cup win over Ajax in 1996.

Franck GAVA
3.2.70. Paris Saint-Germain. 2 caps.
Recalled after some fine displays early this season with PSG in the Champions League.

Christian KAREMBEU
3.12.70. Real Madrid (Spa). 29 caps (1 gl).
Born in Lifou, New Caledonia, and won the 1995 French league title with Nantes and then joined Sampdoria in 1995. Made a very public protest, at an Italian league match, of his opposition to French nuclear tests in the South Pacific. Fell out with Sampdoria last year, demanding a transfer to Madrid. Sampdoria would have preferred to sell him to Barcelona, but they relented and finally sold him to Real.

Pierre LAIGLE
12.9.70. Sampdoria (Ita). 8 caps.
Joined Samp two years ago from Lens but considered fortunate to be in the squad since his own form was affected by Samp's poor start to the Italian season. Prefers to play defensive midfield.

Emmanuel PETIT
22.9.70. Arsenal (Eng). 17 caps.
International debut in a 0-0 draw with Poland in August 1990. Transferred to Arsenal last summer from Monaco and quickly proved an effective member of their championship-challenging team.

Patrick VIEIRA
23.6.76. Arsenal (Eng). 5 caps.
Joined Arsenal for £3million from Milan in July 1996 at the behest of Arsene Wenger. His reading of the game and passing has had a major impact in Arsenal's transformation into an attractive side to watch. Only weakness is a low anger threshold.

Zinedine ZIDANE
23.6.72. Juventus (Ita). 28 caps (6 gls).
The new hero of French football who scored two goals on his France debut against the Czech Republic in 1994, when he was voted Best Young Player in France. An Italian title-winner and Champions Cup runner-up with Juve last season and the French representative in the All-Star match which acted as curtain-raiser to the World Cup draw in Marseille in December.

FORWARDS

Bernard DIOMEDE
23.1.74. Auxerre. Uncapped.
Surprisingly called up into the squad last month – illustrating how desperate the search for an effective striker has become.

Youri DJORKAEFF
9.3.68. Internazionale (Ita). 31 caps (15 gls).
Played for Grenoble, Strasbourg, Monaco and Paris Saint-Germain before joining Inter in 1996. Voted 1995 Footballer of the Year by *L'Equipe*. Top division's leading scorer with 20 goals from midfield for Monaco in 1993-94 and outstanding last season for Inter as they finished UEFA Cup runners-up. Father Jean played for France at the 1966 World Cup finals.

Stephane GUIVARC'H
6.9.70. Auxerre. 2 caps (1 gl).
Scored on his debut against South Africa. Joined Auxerre after progressing with Brest, Guingamp and Rennes. Scored 22 goals on loan at Rennes last season.

Christophe DUGARRY
24.3.72. Marseille. 20 caps (2 gls).
Made his international debut in 1994 against Australia and scored the two goals which secured Bordeaux's remarkable quarter-final victory over Milan on their way to reaching the 1996 UEFA Cup Final. Transferred then to Milan but spent most of the season on the sidelines and was then sold to Barcelona last summer, where he suffered a similar fate before Marseille brought him home.

Thierry HENRY
17.8.77. Monaco. Uncapped.
Teenage protege who burst onto the scene for Monaco last season and should get his chance from Jacquet in the coming months.

Patrice LOKO
6.2.70. Paris Saint-Germain. 26 caps (7 gls).
Currently out of the game after a second nervous breakdown in three years. Won the league championship with Nantes in 1995 before tranferring to PSG. Needed treatment from a psychiatric clinic after suffering a mental breakdown in July 1995, brought on by the mixed pressure of his transfer to PSG and domestic difficulties.

Florian MAURICE
20.1.74. Paris Saint-Germain. 4 caps.
Has formed an outstanding partnership in attack at PSG this season with Italian Marco Simone. Joined PSG on a four-year contract last summer from Lyon after scoring 44 goals in 126 League matches.

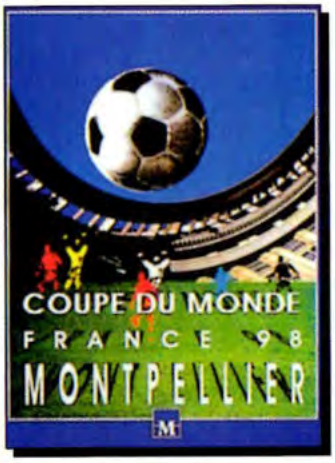
Robert PIRES
29.1.73. Metz. 6 caps (2 gls).
Highly promising young forward in the league but has yet to transfer his talents to the national team.

David TREZEGUET
15.10.77. Monaco. Uncapped.
Called up for the first time last month after several impressive appearances for Monaco in the Champions League and for France at last year's World Youth Cup in Malaysia. Born in France but brought up in Argentina and rejected by Paris Saint-Germain as a teenager.

Talented but partnerless...Youri Djorkaeff

FRANCE 98 POSTERS

EACH of the host cities of France 98 has chosen its own official poster, designed by one of its Beaux Arts students or a local artist. The official poster for the tournament, featured on page 3, was designed by Nathalie Le Gall, a student at the Beaux Arts school in Montpellier.



Germany

Write them off at your peril

Never mind the form book, just look at the record, writes Keir Radnege

WILL HE, or won't he? That is the question which hangs over Germany's bid to become the first European nation to win the World Cup for a record-equalling fourth time.

Will Jurgen Klinsmann win his battle to secure a place in the squad and then the team? Will Matthias Sammer be fit to play or will he have quit the game before then?

Will Berti Vogts take the gamble on Mario Basler which might make all the creative difference or tear the team apart?

It is rare indeed to see Germany approaching a World Cup with so many uncertainties surrounding their team. The impression is of a side who peaked in winning the European Championship two years ago – not the most memorable of German teams, either – and have been fraying at the edges ever since.

Vogts, for all his experience, does not give the impression of a man who has found the answers. Indeed, Vogts's recent complaint that young talent is not coming through is a matter of serious concern.

The evidence was there for all to see as Germany struggled to beat Albania 4-3 in their last match in the qualifiers. Vogts said later: "At one stage, I saw us in the play-offs. If what we want is to leave France early, we've just got to carry on playing the way we did for most of the match against the Albanians."

Apart from Yugoslavia, Germany's opponents in group F are Iran and the US – precisely the sort of under-rated opponents who posed problems in the qualifying round.

Against Albania in Hanover Germany, needing only a draw to qualify, even went behind when Jurgen Kohler headed into his own net. They won only thanks to a header by Oliver Bierhoff in the dying seconds.

Bierhoff lived up to his reputation as Germany's saviour throughout the qualifying ties. His most remarkable feat came on August 20 in Belfast. With Germany losing 1-0 to Northern Ireland, Vogts brought him off the substitutes' bench in the 69th minute. The Udinese man promptly scored three times in seven minutes – the fastest hat-trick in German international history – to earn a precious win.

Another substitute, Ulf Kirsten, also played a key role in Germany's shaky progress. The former East German striker had been on the pitch only a few minutes when he saved his country from only their second defeat in a World Cup qualifier by scoring in the 81st minute to secure a 1-1 draw with Portugal in September in Berlin.

The draw left Germany needing three points out of their last two home games, against Armenia four days later, then Albania.

The Armenia match was the last chance saloon for Klinsmann. After 854 minutes without a goal, the veteran striker, about to win his 100th cap, knew that his World Cup dream hung in the balance. Fortunately he scored twice to inspire a 4-0 win.

Vogts, permitting himself a rare smile, said later: "I think we will keep Jurgen for a few more games. He has a strong personality. He's a natural leader and it's important for the other players to have him on the pitch."

Whether Klinsmann's leadership qualities can outweigh the dip in form which provoked his departure from Sampdoria back to troubled Tottenham – the most desperate gamble of his 11-year international career – is another matter.

Bierhoff's form in both the qualifiers and in Serie A with surprise packet Udinese demands a starting role and Kirsten – his recent nine-game suspension for elbowing national team colleague Thomas Linke notwithstanding – may also expect to be a first-choice. Then Fredi Bobic, after an injury-scarred two years, is back in something like his old form with Stuttgart.

The tactical model remains much the same as ever despite the interest aroused by the successes at Bayern Munich of Italian coach Giovanni Trapattoni. Vogts is likely to rely on a sweeper, two marking central defenders and a five-man midfield.

In goal, Vogts is spoiled for choice between Andy Kopke, one of the Euro 96 heroes, and much-improved Oliver Kahn. Central defence continues to be dominated by Jurgen Kohler and the increasingly influential Thomas Helmer. Vogts has said he will wait for as long as necessary for Matthias Sammer to overcome the knee problems which have resulted in five operations in 18 months. But the sad signs are that Sammer may never play again; consolation for Vogts is that Olaf Thon has been in such superb form that he earned a 'world class' ranking from *Kicker* magazine.

Andy Moller and Thomas Hassler will bring all their experience to bear in midfield. Whether Dariusz Wosz, Michael Tarnat or Jorg Heinrich have the enduring quality to win a World Cup is open to doubt. Whether the erratic Mario Basler can discipline himself to national team demands could be crucial.

The Germans' World Cup record is intimidating. They have competed in the finals every time they have entered, winning (as West Germany) for the first time in 1954.

The roll of honours since then is unrivalled in world football: World Cup runners-up in 1966; third in the World Cup in 1970; European champions for the first time in 1972; World Cup-winners on home soil in 1974; European runners-up only after a penlty shoot-out in 1976; European champions for a second time in 1980; World Cup runners-up for a third time in 1986; European championship semi-finalists in 1988 then runners-up in 1992; World Cup winners again in 1990; quarter-finalists in 1994; European champions in 1996.

And then there's German club success in Europe. Bayern Munich won the Champions Cup three times in a row in the mid-1970s, the Cup-winners Cup in 1967 and added the UEFA Cup in 1996. Dortmund and Hamburg have also won the Champions and Cup-winners Cups. There have been further laps of honour for Werder Bremen in the Cup-winners Cup and for Monchengladbach (twice), Eintracht Frankfurt and Bayer Leverkusen in the UEFA Cup.

Opponents will ignore that foundation at their peril. German teams may not always be technically superior but they possess boundless spirit and self-confidence. They also know exactly how to prepare to hit a peak of performance just when it matters most. When opponents are running out of steam, that's when the Germans are at their most dangerous.

It's called timing. It's a priceless trick. It's worked wonders before. It might work wonders again.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 Did not enter; **1934** Semi-finalists; **1938** 1st round; **1950** Did not enter; **1954** Winners; **1958** Semi-finalists; **1962** Quarter-finalists; **1966** Runners-up; **1970** Semi-finalists; **1974** Winners; **1978** Quarter-finalists; **1982** Runners-up; **1986** Runners-up; **1990** Winners; **1994** Quarter-finalists.

How they qualified

EUROPEAN SECTION – GROUP 9

09.10.96 .....Armenia-Germany.....1-5
09.11.96 .....Germany-Northern Ireland 1-1
14.12.96 .....Portugal-Germany.....0-0
02.04.97 .....Albania-Germany.....2-3
30.04.97 .....Germany-Ukraine.....2-0
07.06.97 .....Ukraine-Germany.....0-0
20.08.97 .....Northern Ireland-Germany 1-3
06.09.97 .....Germany-Portugal.....1-1
06.09.97 .....Armenia-Albania.....3-0
10.09.97 .....Germany-Armenia.....4-0
11.10.97 .....Germany-Albania.....4-3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
***Germany**	**10**	**6**	**4**	**0**	**23**	**9**	**22**
Ukraine	10	6	2	2	10	6	20
Portugal	10	5	4	1	12	4	19
Armenia	10	1	5	4	8	17	8
N Ireland	10	1	4	5	6	10	7
Albania	10	1	1	8	7	20	4

**Qualified as group winners*

Players used in qualifiers

Nine appearances Klinsmann, Kohler, Kopke.
Seven Heinrich, Helmer.
Six Eilts, Hassler, Kirsten, Reuter, Tarnat, Ziege.
Five Basler, Babbel, Bobic, Moller, Wosz.
Four Nowotny.
Three Sammer.
Two Kuntz, Passlack, Scholl, Thon, Worns.
One Bode, Kahn, Kmetsch, Marschall, Ricken, Strunz.

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Six Bierhoff.
Five Kirsten.
Three Hassler, Klinsmann.
One Basler, Bobic, Kuntz, Helmer, Marschall, Moller.

German legend...coach Berti Vogts

THE COACH

Hans-Hubert 'Berti' VOGTS
30.12.46.
One of the outstanding figures in post-war German football history who played 96 internationals, including the victorious 1974 World Cup Final. Spent 14 years (1965-1979) with his only club, Borussia Monchengladbach. Won the UEFA Cup twice; German League five times; and German Cup once. Footballer of the Year in 1971 and 1979. Joined the DFB coaching staff in 1979 – first as a youth, then under-21 team coach. Former assistant to national manager Franz Beckenbauer; succeeded him after the 1990 World Cup victory in Italy.

GOALKEEPERS

Oliver KAHN
Date of birth: 15.6.69. Club: Bayern Munich. 8 caps.
International debut in 1995 against Switzerland. Started as a teenager with Karlsruhe and graduated through their youth ranks. Joined Bayern for a record fee for a German goalkeeper of £2million. Germany's No 3 goalkeeper at the 1994 World Cup finals then No 2 at Euro 96.

Andreas KOPKE
12.3.62. Marseille (Fra). 48 caps.
Qualified car mechanic who won eight caps for the German Olympic team. Member of Germany's World Cup squads in both 1990 and 1994. Footballer of the Year in 1993. Transferred to France from Eintracht Frankfurt after Euro 96.

Jens LEHMANN
10.11.69. Schalke. Uncapped.
One of the heroes of Schalke's shock UEFA Cup win last season. Joined Schalke in 1987 from Schwarz-Weiss Essen.

DEFENDERS

Markus BABBEL
8.9.72. Bayern Munich. 26 caps (1 gl).
Joined Bayern in 1981 but loaned to Hamburg 1992-94. Attacking stopper but considered the fairest defender in Germany. Loyal Bavarian, famous for saying: "I don't want to go to a foreign club. I was already playing for one in Hamburg!"

Thomas HELMER
21.4.65. Bayern Munich. 63 caps (3 gls).
Played for Bad Salzuflen, Arminia Bielefeld and Borussia Dortmund before joining Bayern amid controversy in 1992. Preferred position is sweeper or libero though he has played most of his football at top level as a man-marker.

Jurgen KOHLER
6.10.65. Borussia Dortmund. 95 caps (1 gl).
Still one of Europe's most effective man-markers after a career which took him to Dortmund via Italy. Made his name with Koln and Bayern. Transferred to Juventus in 1991 for £5m, then a world record for a defender. Honours include World Cup (1990), German League (1990, 1996), UEFA Cup (1993), Italian League (1995), Champions Cup (1996). Returned to Germany in 1995. Intended retiring from national team football after Euro 96 but changed his mind when early injury meant he missed virtually the entire event.

Stefan REUTER
16.10.66. Borussia Dortmund. 64 caps (2 gls).
Can play full-back, stopper, sweeper or in midfield. World Cup winner in 1990. A surprise signing by Juventus in 1991. Twice a German League champion, with both Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund.

Matthias SAMMER
5.9.67. Borussia Dortmund. 51 caps (8 gls).
(Also 23 caps and six goals for East Germany). Long-standing knee trouble may cost him not only a place at the World Cup finals but his entire career. First East German to play in the unified German national team. German champion with Stuttgart in 1992 and Dortmund in 1995 and 1996. Returned home after only half a season in Italy with Inter in 1992-93. First former East German to be voted Footballer of the Year in the unified Germany in 1995, then European Footballer of the Year in 1996. Attacking sweeper who inspired Dortmund's Champions Cup victory last year.

Thomas STRUNZ
25.4.68. Bayern Munich. 34 caps (1 gl).
Played for Tura Duisburg, MSV Duisburg, Bayern Munchen, VfB Stuttgart and rejoined Bayern in the major Beckenbauer spending spree of 1995. European Championship winner a year later.

Olaf THON
1.5.66. Schalke. 42 caps (3 gls).
Outstanding young midfielder with the 1988 European Championship squad. Began with Schalke, was converted to sweeper while with Bayern and returned to Schalke four years ago with subsequent, unexpected success. Likely deputy for Sammer.

MIDFIELDERS

Mario BASLER
18.12.68. Bayern Munich. 26 caps (2 gls).
Erratic right-side midfielder with great talent for football and controversy. The Bundesliga's joint top scorer in 1994-95 on 20 goals. Nicknamed Super Mario. Specialist at dead ball situations. Joined Bayern from Werder Bremen after Euro 96.

Dieter HAMANN
27.8.73. Bayern Munich. 1 cap (1 gl).
Outstanding midfielder this past year, his ninth with Bayern and recently the subject of a bid from Atletico Madrid.

Thomas 'Icke' HASSLER
30.5.66. Karlsruhe. 88 caps (11 gls).
One of the most inventive German midfielders of the last 20 years. Footballer of the Year in 1989 and 1992. World Cup winner in 1990 and a member of the national team at USA 94. Spent one season with Juventus before being sold to Roma in 1991 for £5.8m. Voted most outstanding player at the 1992 European Championship finals in Sweden. Has recovered from two serious leg injuries.

Andreas MOLLER
2.9.67. Borussia Dortmund. 73 caps (26 gls).
A youth protege of Berti Vogts, who forecast that Moller would be Germany's midfield general in the mid-1990s. Member of the West German squad which won the 1990 World Cup. Played at the finals of the 1992 European Championship and 1994 World Cup but missed the Euro 96 Final because of suspension – having converted the decisive semi-final penalty against England. Started for Juventus for two years from 1992 to 1994 and then helped inspire Dortmund's victory over them in last year's Champions League Final.

Mehmet SCHOLL
16.10.70. Bayern Munich. 15 caps (1 gl).
Of Turkish origins. Began with Karlsruhe. Turkish clubs were interested in signing him but Bayern beat them to it in 1992. Outstanding 'touch' player. Subject of controversy – a regular in the national squad even when not first choice with his club.

Michael TARNAT
27.10.69. Bayern Munich. 7 caps.
Late developer, having forced his way into the national squad only in the past year. Can play central midfield or left wing-back, the role for which Bayern signed him from Karlsruhe to replace Ziege last summer.

Christian WORNS
10.5.72. Bayer Leverkusen. 11 caps.
Muscular wing-back who joined Leverkusen in 1991 and has since played more than 200 Bundesliga matches. Moves to Paris Saint-Germain after the World Cup finals.

Dariusz WOSZ
8.6.69. Bochum. 5 caps (1 gl).
(Four caps for former East Germany). Terrier-like midfield style earned him a starting role for much of last year. Joined Bochum in 1991 from Hallescher.

Christian ZIEGE
1.2.72. Milan (Ita). 34 caps (3 gls).
Left wing-back who enjoys the attacking role but is not as happy when he has to defend or mark a nippy winger. Began as a goalkeeper before making his name at senior level with Bayern Munich. Represented Germany at every level but missed the 1994 World Cup finals because of injury. Joined Milan last summer.

FORWARDS

Oliver BIERHOFF
1.5.68. Udinese (Ita). 19 caps (13 gls).
Germany's most effective goal-scorer now with a remarkable record as super-sub since making his national team debut in 1996 against Portugal. Most famous goal was the golden one which won Germany the Euro 96 Final against the Czechs. Began with Essener SG, moving up via Schwarz-Weiss Essen, Bayer Uerdingen, Hamburg, Borussia Monchengladbach, Austria Salzburg, Ascoli and now with surprise packet Udinese in Italy.

Fredi BOBIC
30.10.71. VfB Stuttgart. 18 caps (2 gls).
Born in Maribor, Slovenia. Jurgen Klinsmann was his original football idol. Now back at his best after injury problems which began during the finals of Euro 96.

Jurgen KLINSMANN
30.7.64. Tottenham (Eng). 100 caps (43 gls).
National captain but no longer guaranteed a starting place. Has played football in four countries: Germany, Italy, France and England. World Cup-winner in 1990 and won 1991 UEFA Cup with Inter. Twice German Footballer of the Year (1988, 1994) and England's Footballer of the Year in 1995. Played for Monaco and Tottenham before scoring a record 15 goals in Bayern's 1996 UEFA Cup success. Secured his elusive German League title in 1997. Spent only an unhappy, injury-hit six months with Sampdoria before taking off for Tottenham.

Ulf KIRSTEN
4.12.65. Bayer Leverkusen. 25 caps (11 gls).
(49 caps for the former East Germany). Top scorer in the Bundesliga at halfway point and close to a place in the starting line-up. Spoiled his season when cuaght by TV cameras hitting Schalke's Thomas Rinke in an off-the-ball incident and banned for nine games as a result.

Olaf MARSCHALL
19.3.66. Kaiserslautern. 3 caps (1 gl).
(Four caps for the former East Germany). Back to form in Kaiserslautern's shock race to the top of the Bundesliga. Ligaments injury then spoiled his season. Says he is now fully fit and ready to challenge for a World Cup place. Starred in the former East Germany for Lok Leipzig and Dynamo Dresden. Moved to unified German football via Admira Wacker of Vienna.

Captain but not invincible...Jurgen Klinsmann

Holland

Struggling with the demons

The Dutch may again prove their own worst enemies, writes Klaas-Jan Droppert

QUALIFICATION for a major tournament has always been a difficult task for the Dutch national team. You don't have to cast your mind back far. Remember that crucial match against England in Rotterdam when Ronald Koeman should have been sent off for bringing down David Platt but later sealed the fate of the English from a free-kick?

Or how Holland had to rely on beating the Republic of Ireland in a play-off at Anfield to reach the finals of Euro 96?

This time things were different. The traditional slow start never materialised. With a 10-2 aggregate over Wales and a crucial victory in Brussels against arch-rivals Belgium, tickets for France were as good as booked by December 1996.

The Orange Machine never let it slip away. The only hiccup was a 1-0 defeat in Turkey, despite being the better team. It was another battle of the low countries which ensured Holland's qualification for a major tournament for the sixth time in a row. The Dutch left their group opponents trailing in their wake with six victories, one draw and only one defeat.

The qualification campaign was all the more remarkable when you consider that European Championship disappointment took place less than two years ago. But things have changed...not least on the pitch. Coach Guus Hiddink decided to abandon the typical Dutch 4-3-3 system in favour of a more internationally appropriate 4-4-2. In domestic terms, that meant Hiddink switched from the Ajax philosophy to the PSV trademark.

So it should could as no surprise that the coach has invited many PSV players to join the squad.

With the presence of such players as Wim Jonk, Phillip Cocu, Jaap Stam and Arthur Numan in the starting line-up, Ajax have lost their dominance in the national team set-up, although most of the foreign-based players have Ajax roots.

Despite Ajax's dominance of the Dutch League this season, Hiddink won't change his the system, because he is known for his loyalty to his players. So, injuries or loss of form withstanding, don't be surprised if this is the starting line-up for Holland's opening match in France.

In goal will be Edwin Van der Sar, not the world's most spectacular keeper, but absolutely reliable when it comes to reflexes, man-to-man situations or handling back passes. In front of Van der Sar will be his club team-mate Frank De Boer, who leads the defence.

Defence has always been one of Holland's weakest points. But with speedy markers Jaap Stam and Michael Reiziger, who both know exactly what is required of them, Hiddink has fewer worries than his predecessors. And because no team is likely to play with more than two strikers, Arthur Numan will have space to make his attacks down the left.

However, Numan has good reason to be looking nervously over his shoulder at Winston Bogarde. Against stronger opponents, it is possible that Hiddink will want to play the physically stronger Barcelona player.

In midfield, there are numerous candidates for the four positions. In the centre, Wim Jonk has nothing to fear. His main job will be to provide passes for Dennis Bergkamp, as he has done so many times in the past. On the right, Jonk will be assisted by Clarence Seedorf. The young Real Madrid midfielder has an excellent chance to make that position his own, although he is pressing to be played behind the strikers. That position is likely to go to Ronald De Boer, which means there will be no place for Aaron Winter, the squad's most experienced player.

On the left-hand side of midfield Hiddink has no less than five options and must therefore be happy that Richard Witschge has announced his intention not to wear the orange jersey any more. Phillip Cocu is certain to play there instead, and will have a more defensive role.

Boudewijn Zenden, Marc Overmars and Giovanni Bronckhorst are all competing for that same position, but it looks likely that rebel Edgar Davids will be Cocu's reserve. Hiddink has never made any secret of his admiration for Davids's temperamental character. From day one, the coach has been looking for passionate players, and Davids is the perfect example. However, since criticising his coach at Euro 96 and being sent home as a result, Davids has played no part in the national team. Now Hiddink is willing to give the player, who recently moved from Milan to Juventus, a second chance.

Up front, Dennis Bergkamp and Patrick Kluivert should give every defence a headache. At the moment Bergkamp is in the form of his life and has all the potential to be one of the brightest stars in France. Whether Kluivert joins Bergkamp there depends on his possible conviction for his alleged role in a rape case.

That is Hiddink's biggest concern. However, overall the outlook is bright. Most players are earning their money with Europe's leading clubs and have experience of competing in major tournaments. And everybody in Holland is pleased to have been drawn in a group with Belgium, Mexico and South Korea.

But when it comes to winning the World Cup, it takes a lot more than just a talanted squad. At every major tournament since winning the European title in 1988, it seems that not all the players have had that ultimate goal of winning the World Cup.

Every time Holland are their own worst enemies. In the past, players have criticised the coach (Davids v Hiddink, 1996), walked out of training camps (Gullit v Advocaat, 1994), or quarelled over money.

This time there is still unfinished business over supposed racial problems. Players of Surinamese origin (mainly Seedorf and Kluivert) feel they are being discriminated against. They are trying, just like the De Boer brothers are, to fill the vacuum left by the departure from the national team of players like Koeman, Wouters and Gullit.

Both groups have little going for them in terms of natural leadership. The only person who could do that would be Dennis Bergkamp, but he doesn't want to be involved.

It is imperative that Hiddink keeps these simmering conflicts under control, and more besides. If he succeeds, Holland may be strong enough to reach the semi-finals.

If he fails, even the quarter-finals, the limit of Holland's achievements four years ago and in 1996, may prove too much.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 Did not enter; **1934** 1st round; **1938** 2nd round; **1950** Did not enter; **1954** Did not qualify; **1958** Did not qualify; **1962** Did not qualify; **1966** Did not qualify; **1970** Did not qualify; **1974** Runners-up; **1978** Runners-up; **1982** Did not qualify; **1986** Did not qualify; **1990** 2nd round; **1994** Quarter-finalists.

HOW THEY QUALIFIED

EUROPEAN SECTION GROUP 7

05.10.96 .....Wales-Holland 1-3
09.11.96 .....Holland-Wales 7-1
14.12.96 .....Belgium-Holland 0-3
29.03.97 ..... Holland-San Marino 4-0
02.04.97 .....Turkey-Holland 1-0
30.04.97 .....San Marino-Holland 0-6
06.09.97 .....Holland-Belgium 3-1
11.10.97 .....Holland-Turkey 0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
***Holland**	**8**	**6**	**1**	**1**	**26**	**4**	**19**
Belgium	8	6	0	2	20	11	18
Turkey	8	4	2	2	21	9	14
Wales	8	2	1	5	20	21	7
San Marino	8	0	0	8	0	42	0

*Holland qualify for finals

Players used in qualifiers

Eight appearances F De Boer, Seedorf.
Seven Cocu, Jonk, Reiziger, Stam, Winter.
Six Bergkamp, R De Boer, Van Hooijdonk.
Five Kluivert, Overmars.
Four Van Bronckhorst.
Three Bogarde, Jordi Cruyff.
One Bosman, Makaay, Valckx, Vierklau, Zenden.

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Seven Dennis Bergkamp.
Four Pierre Van Hooijdonk.
Two Ronald De Boer, Wim Jonk, Patrick Kluivert.
One John Bosman, Phillip Cocu, Phillip Cocu, Jaap Stam, Aron Winter.

Still in command...coach Guus Hiddink

THE COACH

Guus HIDDINK
8.11.46.
Succeeded Dick Advocaat in December 1994. A player with De Graafschap, PSV and NEC Nijmegen, before moving to the North American Soccer League with Washington Diplomats and San Jose Earthquakes. Took up coaching on his return to Holland and guided PSV to European Champions Cup success in 1988. Also worked in Spain and Turkey.

GOALKEEPERS

Ed DE GOEY
20.10.66. Chelsea (Eng). 29 caps.
Played at USA 94 but lost his place to Van der Sar during qualifiers for Euro 96 as he struggled along with all his team-mates at Feyenoord. Played for Sparta Rotterdam before moving across town to Feyenoord. In Holland's starting line up against South Africa last June where he impressed Ruud Gullit, who asked him to join Chelsea.

Ruud HESP
31.10.65. Barcelona (Spa). Uncapped.
A squad regular (and likely third choice) after replacing Vitor Baia in the Barcelona starting line-up. Played for modest clubs like Fortuna Sittard and Roda JC in the southern part of the country before move to Spain last summer.

Edwin VAN DER SAR
29.10.70. Ajax Amsterdam. 21 caps.
Indisputably Holland's number one keeper and one of the world's most reliable. Product of the Ajax youth system, who played all matches at Euro 96. Outstanding reflexes and has some of the best ball skills of any keeper anywhere in the world. Louis Van Gaal wanted him at Barcelona, but he respected the player's contract at Ajax.

DEFENDERS

Michael REIZIGER
2.05.73. Barcelona (Spa). 22 caps.
Another product of the Ajax system, but couldn't make it in Amsterdam at first. Went on loan to Volendam and Groningen before Ajax called him back and turned him into a right-back. Failed in Italy with Milan but now back with former coach Louis Van Gaal and should regain his form.

Frank DE BOER
15.05.70. Ajax Amsterdam. 50 caps (5 gls).
Skipper of club and country. Plays left-back at Ajax and centre-back in the national team. Prefers the latter. Missed Euro 96 through injury. Just like his twin brother Ronald, Frank is one of the key men in the squad, although he hasn't got the charisma of his predecessor Ronald Koeman.

Jaap STAM
17.07.72. PSV Eindhoven. 10 caps (1 gl).
Player of the year in Holland. Powerful and speedy centre-back, who started his career as midfielder. Played for FC Zwolle and Cambuur Leeuwarden before entering the First Division with Willem II Tilburg. A last-minute replacement for Frank de Boer during Euro 96 but didn't play.

Winston BOGARDE
22.10.70. Barcelona (Spa). 10 caps.
Tough-tackling, physically strong left-sided defender. With SVV Schiedam and Sparta Rotterdam before joining Ajax. Was Holland's best player at Euro 96 but lost his place to Arthur Numan through injury and a quarrel at Ajax. Went to Milan last summer but has already been sold to Barcelona. Could be back in the starting line-up in France if he regains his form.

Arthur NUMAN
14.12.69. PSV Eindhoven. 24 caps.
Skipper of PSV and currently in the form of his life. Likely starter after excellent qualifying games. Started his career at Haarlem and later went to Twente. Sold to PSV in 1992 and transformed into left-back. Didn't like the position at first, but now knows it's his only chance to reach France. Squad member at Euro 96 but didn't play.

Ferdi VIERKLAU
1.4.73. Tenerife (Spa). 2 caps.
Of Surinam origin and understudy to Reiziger. At Utrecht before joining Vitesse in 1996. Moved to Gran Canaria last summer, putting his squad spot at stake as Hiddink won't go to Tenerife very often.

Andre OOYER
11.7.74. PSV Eindhoven. Uncapped
Recently sold by Roda to PSV. Versatile player who will be the successor of Phillip Cocu in Eindhoven. Already a member of the squad and may get his chance during the pre-World Cup friendlies.

MIDFIELDERS

Wim JONK
12.10.66. PSV Eindhoven. 35 caps (10 gls).
Gifted playmaker, who left his home-town club Volendam for Ajax. Took over from Jan Wouters in Amsterdam and won the Cup-winners Cup in 1993 and then left for Internazionale. He couldn't impress the *tifosi* although he scored the only goal in second leg of the UEFA Cup Final in 1994. One of the stars of USA 94 but after a miserable second season with Inter, went home to play for PSV. Missed Euro 96 as a result of his problems with Inter, but is back in his favourite midfield role.

Clarence SEEDORF
1.4.76. Real Madrid (Spa). 26 caps (6 gls).
Made his debut with Ajax aged16 and won the Champions Cup at 19. Joined Sampdoria before catching the eye of Real Madrid. As a central midfielder he made an outstanding contribution in Real's title win but Hiddink doesn't think he can handle the responsibility and plays him on the right wing. His strong Surinam feelings often cause internal conflicts. Poor in Euro 96, should get his revenge in France.

Ronald DE BOER
15.5.70. Ajax Amsterdam. 40 caps (9 gls).
Another player from Ajax who was intially unable to claim a regular position in the Ajax attack and went on loan to Twente. Has exceptional technique and creates opportunities for other players, but as a striker he was never a regular scorer. During training in USA 94 he played on the right side of the midfield and became a world class player at Ajax at this position. In the national team he often plays behind Kluivert and Bergkamp.

Aron WINTER
1.3.67. Inter (Ita). 67 caps (2 gls).
Started his career with Ajax before moving to Lazio, where he stayed for five years. Switched to Internazionale last season. Most experienced player in the squad, but has never been a regular. France 98 will be his sixth major tournament. A member of the squad that won the European Championships in 1988, but didn't play. Seems to accept his role as a substitute.

Phillip COCU
29.10.70,. PSV Eindhoven. 15 caps (2 gls).
Versatile player, who can play as sweeper, central midfielder or on the left wing. Grabbed his chance when Hiddink changed his team into a 4-4-2 system. Will play at Barcelona or Inter Milan next year. At AZ Alkmaar and Vitesse Arnhem before joining PSV.

Jean Paul VAN GASTEL
28.4.72. Feyenoord. 2 caps (2 gls).
Playmaker at Feyenoord. Made his debut in a friendly against Brazil in which he equalised with a last-minute penalty. Has struggled this season like the everyone at Feyenoord. Previously played for NAC Breda and Willem II Tilburg.

Giovanni VAN BRONCKHORST
5.2.75. Feyenoord. 7 caps (1 gl).
Comes from a Moluccan family and is one of the few youth products from Feyenoord to have reached the senior squad. Used by Hiddink on the left side, but has a more central role at Feyenoord. Reserve in France.

Boudewijn ZENDEN
15.8.76. PSV Eindhoven. 2 caps.
Speedy winger who made his debut against San Marino. Regarded as a big PSV talent for many years and finally breaking through this season. Combined judo and football for a long time.

Edgar DAVIDS
13.3.73. Juventus (Ita). 9 caps.
Ever since criticising Hiddink at Euro 96 and being sent home, Davids has not been part of Hiddink's plans. But it now seems he may get a second and final chance during the warm-up game. One of the most gifted and passionate players in Holland, he left Ajax in the summer of 1996 to join Milan but a broken leg left him out of action most of last season. Now has a chance at Juventus, who he joined before Christmas, to show his enormous talent.

Marc OVERMARS
29.3.73. Arsenal (Eng). 35 caps (6 gls).
Another player who lost his place though injury. Headed for Highbury instead of finishing his contract with Ajax. Ignored for the decisive match against Belgium. Can play up front or on either wing. Although he is regaining his form in the Premier League, he is likely to start on the bench.

FORWARDS

Dennis BERGKAMP
10.5.69. Arsenal (Eng). 57 caps (33 gls).
Indisputably Holland's man of the moment. Like so many he started his career at Ajax, where he began as a winger and was transferred to a central midfield position. Had a disappointing spell at Internazionale but revived at Arsenal and playing his best football this season. Only two goals short to equal Faas Wilkes' all time goalscoring record. As much as he hates it, Bergkamp should claim leadership of the current squad.

Patrick KLUIVERT
1.7.76. Milan (Ita). 16 caps (6 gls).
Another product of the Ajax youth system. Famous for scoring the decisive goal in the Champions League Final in 1995 but now making headlines for the wrong reasons. Was involved in a fatal car accident and has to appear in court for his role in a rape affair last summer. He could miss France if if convicted. On top of that he is struggling with Milan. But he can still count on Hiddink's support.

Pierre VAN HOOIJDONK
22.11.69. Nott'm Forest (Eng). 9 caps (4 gls).
Tall target man used by Hiddink as a supersub. Despite not performing at the highest level, Hiddink stays loyal to him.

Youri MULDER
23.3.69. Schalke 04 (Ger). 8 caps (3 gls).
Lost his place as a supersub when injured, and with Van Hooijdonk performing well, his role looks uncertain. Son of former Anderlecht and Ajax player Jan.

In the form of his life...Dennis Bergkamp

Iran

The political party

If they can focus on football the Iranians could spring a surprise, says Adel Ferdowsipour

EVEN NOW, several weeks after the event, the people of Iran can hardly believe that their team are going back to the World Cup for the first time since their only previous appearance, in 1978.

Six million people watched in amazement as the players, who had virtually thrown away their chance of qualifying, suddenly came good once more and, against all the odds, snatched their chance back.

Now they are off to France. But where in 1978 they lost to Holland, drew with Scotland and were crushed by Peru, now the masses anticipate success against Yugoslavia, the United States and Germany.

In theory, the Iranians may well do better than their 'on paper' chances suggest. Soccer in Iran has improved greatly in recent years, with some heartening performances in Asian tournaments at both international and club level, and a few of the squad are based in Europe, with a consequent increase in their professionalism and level of technique.

Sadly for Iran, however, there is a more to a World Cup than the football. The Iranians will go to Europe as political outsiders, scorned and shunned just as they in turn scorn and shun Westerners.

Indeed, there is considerable irony in the draw's pairing of Iran with the Americans, a David-and-Goliath confrontation if ever there was one.

If the Iranian squad can keep their focus on football and nothing but football, they may just spring a surprise. If they lose concentration by becoming involved in political and personal debate, they will have no hope.

There is also political pressure of a sort on the domestic scene, and much depends on coach Tomislav Ivic, the third team boss in little more than three months.

Under Majeli Kohan, Iran had begun well and swept through the first of their qualifying groups with five wins and a draw, including a record 17 goals against Maldives – away! – in their total of 39.

They then won three and drew two of their first five games in the second stage, and needed only four more points from the last three fixtures to ensure direct qualification. Then disaster set in. They lost to Saudi Arabia, drew with Kuwait and lost to Qatar, finished second in their group, and had to go into a play-off against Australia, winners of the Oceania section, if they were to get through.

The more experienced Aussies seemed to have the tie won when they forced a 1-1 draw in front of almost 130,000 hostile fans in Tehran, with the return to come in Melbourne. But the Iranians, despite being two down with only 17 minutes to go, forced another draw and went through on away goals.

By this time a little-known Brazilian, Valdir Vieira, had taken over from Kohan, whose decision to drop Khodadad Azizi – 1996 Asian Footballer of the Year – had caused a nationwide storm and cost him his job.

Vieira, who had been in charge of the Olympic squad, had barely changed offices when he was succeeded by Ivic, a much-travelled 62-year-old who had been reluctant to leave his family, and does not speak the language.

In addition to having the coaching changes, the squad also have had to cope with a switch of Football Federation president, with the 'unknown' Safaei Farahani taking over from Dariush Mostafavi, a man remembered for his failure to recruit Cruyff, or Penev, or Bilardo, or even Milutinovic, all of whom apparently had been lined up.

"I don't think that the change of president will cause me to lose my job," Vieira had said, in a touching admission of his faith in his employers. Shortly afterwards, he was to find out that he had been wrong.

In turn, the Yugoslavs, Americans and Germans will be wrong if they take Iran for easy meat in the finals. There is a hard edge to the Iranian game, honed by the status of players as major figures in a male-dominated society.

With little in the way of counter-attractions, football does well in Tehran: a match between the two major clubs, Esteghlal and Pirouzi, often attracts a six-figure attendance.

There are four key players in the squad, and all of them – significantly – have had experience in Europe. Karim Bagheri, nominally a midfielder, is a prolific scorer (ask the Maldives goalkeeper). Centre-back Mohammad Khakpour has played in Turkey and Singapore, and the two main front men, Ali Daei and Khodadad Azizi, are both based in Germany, with Arminia Bielefeld and Koln respectively.

The others are unlikely to match this standard, but Ivic is a wily old bird who may have found a good one or two by the time the whistle blows.

Ivic, criticised during his time with the UAE for being too defensive, is likely to stick with the wing-back system which served his predecessors so well. Shahroudi and Saadavi attack with pace on the flanks, while Estili does the legwork in midfield. But Bagheri, Azizi and Daei are the ones to watch.

Iran's major contribution to their one and only World Cup before now was Eskandarian's ludicrous own goal during the 1-1 draw with the Scots in Argentina 20 years ago.

Hopefully they will have better memories this time.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 Did not enter; **1934** Did not enter; **1938** Did not enter; **1950** Did not enter; **1954** Did not enter; **1958** Did not enter; **1962** Did not enter; **1966** Did not enter; **1970** Did not enter; **1974** Did not qualify; **1978** 1st round; **1982** Did not enter; **1986** Did not enter; **1990** Did not qualify; **1994** Did not qualify.

Total games Played 3, won 0, drawn 1, lost 2 goals for 2, goals against 8.

How they qualified

ASIAN QUALIFYING SECTION

FIRST ROUND, GROUP 2

02.06.97 .....Maldives-Iran 0-17
04.06.97 .....Kyrgyzstan-Iran 0-7
06.06.97 .....Syria-Iran 0-1
09.06.97 .....Iran-Kyrgyzstan 3-1
11.06.97 .....Iran-Maldives 9-0
15.06.97 .....Iran-Syria 2-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
***Iran**	**6**	**5**	**1**	**0**	**39**	**3**	**16**
Kyrgyzstan	5	3	0	2	12	11	9
Syria	5	2	1	2	27	5	7
Maldives	6	0	0	6	0	59	0

*Iran qualify for second round

SECOND ROUND, GROUP A

13.09.97 .....China PR-Iran 2-4
14.09.97 .....Saudi Arabia-Kuwait 2-1
19.09.97 .....Iran-Saudi Arabia 1-1
19.09.97 .....Qatar-Kuwait 0-2
26.09.97 .....Kuwait-Iran 1-1
26.09.97 .....Qatar-China PR 1-1
03.10.97 .....China PR-Saudi Arabia 1-0
03.10.97 .....Iran-Qatar 3-0
10.10.97 .....Kuwait-China PR 1-2
11.10.97 .....Saudi Arabia-Qatar 1-0
17.10.97 .....Iran-China PR 4-1
17.10.97 .....Kuwait-Saudi Arabia 2-1
24.10.97 .....Kuwait-Qatar 0-1
24.10.97 .....Saudi Arabia-Iran 1-0
31.10.97 .....China PR-Qatar 2-3
31.10.97 .....Iran-Kuwait 0-0
06.11.97 .....Saudi Arabia-China PR 1-1
07.11.97 .....Qatar-Iran 2-0
12.11.97 .....China PR-Kuwait 1-0
12.11.97 .....Qatar-Saudi Arabia 0-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
*S Arabia	8	4	2	2	8	6	14
***Iran**	**8**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**13**	**8**	**12**
China PR	8	3	2	3	11	14	11
Qatar	8	3	1	4	7	10	10
Kuwait	8	2	2	4	7	8	8

*Saudi Arabia qualify; Iran enter play-off

PLAY-OFF (IN MALAYSIA)

16.11.97 .....Japan-Iran 3-2

Japan qualify; Iran enter Asia-Oceania play-off

ASIA-OCEANIA PLAY-OFF

22.11.97 .....Iran-Australia 1-1
29.11.97 .....Australia-Iran 2-2

Iran qualify for finals on away goals

Players used in qualifiers

(Final 11 matches)

Eleven appearances Abedzadeh, Mahdavikia, Estili, Mansourian, Daei.
Ten Khakpour, Peyrovani, Shahroudi.
Nine Bagheri, Rousta.
Seven Azizi.
Six Minavand, Asadi,
Three Saadavi, Pashazadeh, Majidi.
Two Tahami, Mohammadi, Garroussi.
One Bakhtiari, Golmohammadi, Halali, Heidari, Motlagh, Yazdani, Zarinche.

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Seventeen Bagheri.
Nine Daei.
Eight Azizi.
Four Mansourian, Mahdavikia.
Three Shahroudi, Estili.
Two Rousta, Majidi, Minavand.
One Mousavi.

PROFILES

Experienced operator...Tomislav Ivic

THE COACH

Tomislav IVIC
30.6.33.
Veteran Croatian coach appointed in January 1998. A player with Hajduk Split before embarking on an extensive club coaching career across Europe with Anderlecht (Bel), Galatasaray (Tur), Avellino (Ita), Panathinaikos (Gre), Dinamo Zagreb (Yug), FC Porto (Por), Paris St-Germain (Fra), Atletico Madrid (Spa), Marseille (Fra), Benfica (Por), FC Porto again, the Croatian national team and the United Arab Emirates. On his appointment as Iran coach, Ivic set up meetings with the players and federation directors. "We do not have much time," he said. "We will have to furnish much effort to get past our difficult group. We will need to play at least 11 preparation matches, home and away." Ivic also watched tapes of each of Iran's qualifying matches, after which he ordered four consecutive training sessions, morning and afternoon, for his new charges. Ivic also sent his Croatian assistant, Jelko Miatch, to Germany to check up on the star Iranian trio playing in the Bundesliga.

GOALKEEPERS

Ahmad Reza ABEDZADEH
Date of birth: 26.5.66. Club: Pirouzi. 70 caps.
Team captain and experienced campaigner who made his international debut more than a decade ago. Well established as Iran's number one, despite two years out with a serious injury. Capable of Higuita-esque tendencies – he likes to dribble around strikers – which he can get away with at club level, but which new coach Ivic will be keen to stamp out. Previous clubs: Tam, Esteghlal, Sepahan.

Parvis BROUMAND
Aged 23. Esteghlal. Uncapped.
Up-and-coming keeper who will be included in the squad for experience but is unlikely to get a game in France.

Nima NAKISA
1.5.75. Pirouzi. 7 caps.
A young but reliable substitute for Abedzadeh for club and country. Made his name at the 1996 Asian Cup when Abedzadeh was injured and helped Iran to third place. Looks set to take over from Abedzadeh after the World Cup.

DEFENDERS

Markar AGHAJANIAN
4.3.65. Pas. 2 caps.
An accomplished performer at club level whose talents have been ignored by previous national coaches. A potential replacement for Peyrovani nevertheless. Previous club: Ararat.

Akbar Ostad ASADI
17.9.65. Zobe Ahan. 31 caps.
Old hand and a hard worker but lacks confidence when playing for the national side. In the starting line-up for recent matches but little chance of appearing in France.

Farshad FALAHATZADEH
Aged 29. Bahman. 11 caps.
Tough-tackling centre-back who was recently suspended for six months for alleged drug abuse. If he regains his fitness, he will be a key player in France. Previous clubs: Esteghlal, Saipa.

Yahya GOLMOHAMMADI
Aged 35. Pirouzi. 14 caps.
Injury-prone but a confident defender nevertheless. Likely reserve in France.

Mohammad KHAKPOUR
20.2.69. Bahman. 35 caps.
One of the most experienced players in the squad. A calm but determined centre-back and a model professional on and off the pitch. Back in Iran after spells in Turkey and Singapore. Previous clubs: Pas, Pirouzi, Bahman, Geilang (Sin), Vanspor (Tur).

Mehdi PASHAZADEH
27.12.73. Esteghlal. 3 caps.
A young but experienced centre-back who was one of Iran's heroes against Australia in Melbourne. Only capped three times because of problems with the former coach, but has a great chance of competing in the World Cup under Ivic. Selected to appear for the Rest of the World XI against Europe in the All-Star match which preceded the Marseille draw last December, although he did not play. Previous clubs: none.

Afsin PEYROVANI
6.2.70. Pirouzi. 36 caps.
Played at all international levels for Iran, making his senior debut in 1992. Hasn't had a real rival for the sweeper position for some time and has his critics, but his place for France seems secure. Previous clubs: Bargh, Tejarat, Pirouzi, Alsad (Qatar).

MIDFIELDERS

Ali AKBARPOUR
Aged 23. Esteghlal. Uncapped.
Rising star in domestic football who plays on the right flank. Strong dribbling skills.

Karim BAGHERI
20.2.74. Arminia Bielefeld (Ger). 38 caps (33 gls).
A natural goalscorer whose record (almost a goal a game) speaks for itself. He was the overall leading marksman in the France 98 qualifiers with 17 goals, largely thanks to his seven strikes in the 17-0 annihilation of the Maldives, a World Cup record. His reputation is therefore as a goalscorer, but he also performs invaluable tasks as a ball-winner. Strong in the air with a powerful accurate shot. Struggled initially in the Bundesliga but has since become a key player for Bielefeld. Previous clubs: Teraktor, Keshavarz, Pirouzi.

Hamid ESTILI
1.4.67. Bahman. 44 caps (6 gls).
Hard-working midfielder battler who plays the holding role in midfield and covers for Bagheri's attacking runs. Needs to work harder on his shooting but could be one of the team's stars in France. Previous clubs: Pas, Pirouzi, Bahman, Geilang (Sin).

Esmail HALALI
Aged 21. Pirouzi. 6 caps.
One for the future and unlikely to feature heavily in France.

Farhad MAJIDI
3.6.76. Esteghlal. 13 caps (2 gls).
A young, reliable substitute who has yet to establish himself in the national side despite being one of the most expensive players in domestic football.

Ali MANSOURIAN
2.12.71. Esteghlal. 33 caps (6 caps).
Quick dribbler with a strong shot but has rarely reproduced his club form at international level. Talented but inconsistent.

Mehrdad MINAVAND
3.11.75. Pirouzi. 23 caps (3 gls).
A left-sided midfielder who has lost out to Shahroudi in recent games. Good crosser of the ball nevertheless.

Asghar RASOULZADEH
Aged 25. Esteghlal. Uncapped.
One of the stars of the domestic league who has yet to make an impact at international level.

Naeem SAADAVI
Aged 25. Pirouzi. 18 caps (1 gl).
One of the key players for Iran in the 1996 Asian Cup who was later suspended amid allegations of drug abuse. His return to the national team for the play-off against Australia, especially in Tehran, eased Iran's passage to the finals. An energetic worker on the right flank.

Reza SHAHROUDI
21.2.72. Altay (Tur). 33 caps (5 gls).
First choice for the left flank and packs a powerful shot. His spell in Turkey has not worked out, but he and Minavand are the two players in the squad who can fill the left wing-back slot. Previous clubs: Keshavarz, Pirouzi.

Darioush YAZDANI
Aged 18. Moghavemat. 8 caps.
Another young prospect with enormous potential but international prospects have been hampered by playing for a low-profile domestic club.

FORWARDS

Khodadad AZIZI
22.6.71. Koln (Ger). 27 caps (10 gls).
The real star of Iranian football whose goal against Australia in Melbourne secured qualification for France. Last year, Azizi became the first Iranian to win the Asian Footballer of the Year award. A clever player whose behaviour on and off the pitch has made him an idol for many Iranians. Only played six games in the first half of the Bundesliga season, but his partnership with Daei could ruffle a few German feathers in France. Previous clubs: Abou Moslem, Fath, Bahman.

Ali DAEI
21.3.69. Arminia Bielefeld (Ger). 52 caps (38 gls).
Iran's most famous player, along with Azizi. One of a handful of Iranians to have played abroad (Azizi and Bagheri are currently in Germany with Daei, the first foreign-based players since Parvis Gheleechkhani and Andranik Eskandrian played in the North American Soccer League in the 1970s and early 1980s). The second highest top scorer in the Asian qualifying section with nine goals, Daei was dropped by then coach Majeli Kohan before the second round of qualifiers. Only a protest petition organised by fans on the Internet resulted in his reinstatement. A good all-round striker whose experience of German football should benefit Iran in France. Scoring regularly for Bielefeld in the run-up to the Bundesliga winter break. Previous clubs: Tanirani, Tejarat, Pirouzi, Alasad (Qatar).

Hashem HEIDARI
22.12.66. Pas. 2 caps.
Left-footed forward and a likely reserve.

Mehdi MAHDAVIKIA
24.7.77. Pirouzi. 24 caps (5 gls).
The most consistent player in Iran's 17 World Cup qualifiers. A versatile player who can play as defender, midfielder and striker. Tipped for a move to Europe after the World Cup.

Ali MOUSAVI
22.4.74. Pas. 7 caps (1 gl).
Youngster with hopes of being a reserve

Asghar Modir ROUSTA
Aged 30. Bahman. 30 caps (9 gls).
A natural goalscorer at club level but lacks confidence at international level.

Goals galore...Khodadad Azizi

Italy

A blessing in disguise

The Italians, says Paddy Agnew, will have learned from their near miss in the qualifiers

BEFORE YOU write off Italy, think again. Their struggle to qualify for France 98 may prove to have been both misleading and a blessing in disguise – misleading for would-be opponents and a blessing for themselves. In the end, they may prove to have all the necessary right stuff to maintain their own formidable World Cup tradition.

Italy's inability to capitalise on a remarkably favourable qualifying group situation left many commentators, Italian and otherwise, wondering about the overall quality of the current side. Remember that Italy became the first ever side to beat England in a World Cup qualifier at Wembley, winning 1-0 with a classic counter-attacking game.

That February 1997 match was Cesare Maldini's first World Cup qualifier (and only his second game) in charge of Italy, following his appointment in December 1996 in the wake of Arrigo Sacchi's resignation. Maldini could hardly have got off to a better start and that win should have set up Italy for a straightforward downhill run to France 98.

Instead, of course, Italy's percentage game approach was outdone by England. While the Italians concentrated on picking up the once-vital (but now often irrelevant) away point, England had little option but to go all out for away wins. England won and Italy drew away to both Poland and Georgia, and all this meant that when we came to Armageddon against England in Rome last October, the Italians both looked and felt uncomfortable, clamming up on the night with a poor performance in a 0-0 draw in which England had looked the better side. After that it was a case of *sturm und drang*, snowflakes and heroics as Italy won the play-off battles of Moscow and Naples against Russia (1-1 and 1-0).

So can Italy's classic *catenaccio*, complete with sweeper and reliant above all on the counter attack, be definitively dismissed as tactical old hat? Given Cesare Maldini's conservative, cautious approach, can we wipe Italy off our shortlist of possible finalists? Answers: No and No.

Italy certainly did experience difficulties in the final stages of their qualifying group but a number of factors need be borne in mind in assessing the consecutive 0-0 draws with Georgia and England. First and foremost, Italian national teams rarely play well in the months of September and October for the good reason that the Italian Serie A season is one of Europe's late starters.

Secondly, Italy found themselves under unexpected pressure from England's ability to take maximum points from away games (Rome excepted). Maldini doubtless imagined that England might drop a point somewhere along the road, forgetting of course that England had no option but to win everything after the Wembley defeat.

Thirdly, in the battle of Armageddon itself, Maldini fielded an untypical (and unsuccessful) three-man attack. Such a side went against all his own basic instincts and was perhaps a response to an edgy and hostile Italian media. It is not for nothing that the third man in attack against England, Juventus striker Filippo Inzaghi, was substituted at half-time and then dropped for the play-offs against Russia.

Maldini knows all too clearly that Italy have to do better. Within minutes of ensuring qualification against Russia in Naples, he admitted as much when saying that he needed fresh blood, especially in midfield. The fright Italy experienced in Group 2 may prove to their advantage. Had England dropped a point along the way and had a Rome draw been good enough to get Italy to France 98, then Maldini would have been sorely tempted to settle for the side as it was.

However, he now knows that he must make space for more flair, invention and sheer pace and that, while he has more than adequate cover in attack and defence, he needs to strengthen the quality and quantity of his midfield. In that sense, it was no surprise to see him give call-ups to three midfielders – Inter's Francesco Moriero, Fiorentina's Sandro Cois and Roma's Luigi Di Biagio – in a January friendly against Slovakia.

The pace and goal sense of both Moriero and Parma's Enrico Chiesa could let them play their way into a Dino Baggio-Demetrio Albertini-Roberto Di Matteo midfield that has looked more solid than inventive. Furthermore, Italy's difficulties in Group 2 may convince Maldini that the time has come for boy wonder Alessandro Del Piero, perhaps at the expense of Wembley hero Gianfranco Zola.

Changes may come but it is certain that Maldini will remain faithful to his own type of soccer. In other words he will stick to his preferred 'Little and Large' two-man attack of the big central target man and the nippy little blighter. Christian Vieri, Fabrizio Ravanelli and Pierluigi Casiraghi are all in contention for the former role, while Zola and Del Piero are the contenders for the latter spot.

Maldini also seems sure to continue with a five-man defence in which the two full-backs, Angelo Di Livio and Paolo Maldini, also function as attackers and in which Alessandro Costacurta or Ciro Ferrara is sweeper.

While the D.Baggio-Albertini-Di Matteo trio looks a sure starter in midfield, Maldini knows that he must have ready-made cover for them so as to avoid the difficult situation created for him against England in Rome when he found himself without an adequate replacement for Di Matteo. To that end, new boys Cois and Di Biagio, will be brought along between now and June.

Italy's qualifying troubles may also help them overcome their traditionally slow start to a finals tournament. Not only is it likely that Maldini will add one or two fresh elements of pace and flair to the side, but Italy themselves will approach their opening game (Chile in Bordeaux on June 11) in anything but a complacent frame of mind. Nor could one argue that their first round Group B, also including Austria and Cameroon, is especially difficult.

Italy's immense World Cup tradition (three times winners as well as beaten finalists in 1994) and the suitability of Maldini's counter-attacking game to the requirements of an exhausting tournament, where winning sides have to pace themselves, are further reasons for suggesting that Italy will maintain recent tradition. Remember Italy have played in two of the last four Finals and made it to the semi-finals in three of the last four tournaments.

Maldini, of course, knows that if he manages anything less he will be looking for a new job in the autumn of 98.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 Did not enter; **1934** Winners; **1938** Winners; **1950** 1st round; **1954** 1st round; **1958** did not qualify; **1962** 1st round; **1966** 1st round; **1970** Runners-up; **1974** 1st round; **1978** Semi-finalists; **1982** Winners; **1986** 2nd round; **1990** Semi-finalists; **1994** Runners-up.

Total games Played 61, won 35, drawn 14, lost 12, goals for 97, goals against 59

How they qualified

EUROPE GROUP 2

05.10.96 .....Moldova-Italy 1-3
09.10.96 .....Italy-Georgia 1-0
12.02.97 .....England-Italy 0-1
29.03.97 .....Italy-Moldova 3-0
02.04.97 .....Poland-Italy 0-0
30.04.97 .....Italy-Poland 3-0
10.09.97 .....Georgia-Italy 0-0
11.10.97 .....Italy-England 0-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	8	6	1	1	15	2	19
***Italy**	**8**	**5**	**3**	**0**	**11**	**1**	**18**
Poland	8	3	1	4	10	12	10
Georgia	8	3	1	4	7	9	10
Moldova	8	0	0	8	2	21	0

**Italy enter play-offs*

PLAY-OFFS

29.10.97 .....Russia-Italy 1-1
15.11.97 .....Italy-Russia 1-0
Italy win 2-1 on agg

Players used in qualifiers

Ten appearances Maldini
Nine D Baggio, Di Matteo.
Eight Zola, Cannavaro, Costacurta, Ferrara.
Seven Nesta, Peruzzi.
Six Albertini, Ravanelli.
Five Casiraghi, Vieri.
Three Carboni, Del Piero, Pessotto, Fuser
Two R Baggio, Bennarivo, Chiesa, Conte, Inzaghi Panucci, Toldo.
One Eranio, Buffon, Lombardo, Padovano, Pagliuca.

Scorers in qualifiers

Three Ravanelli.
Two Casiraghi, Maldini, Vieri, Zola.
One R Baggio, Di Matteo.

PROFILES

Traditional values...Cesare Maldini

THE COACH

Cesare MALDINI

Stands for traditional Italian virtues of pragmatism, Mediterrean flair and a solid defence, complete with sweeper. As a player, Maldini was captain of Milan, winning the Champions Cup at Wembley in 1963 and collecting 14 caps for Italy. As a coach he was number two to Enzo Bearzot in 1982 and guided Italy's Under-21s to three European titles (1992, 1994 and 1996).

GOALKEEPERS

Gianluigi BUFFON

Date of birth: 28.1.78. Club: Parma. 1 cap.

Won his first cap in true Roy of The Rovers style, coming on in the arctic conditions of Italy's World Cup play-off, first leg against Russia in Moscow, following an injury to Pagliuca. Should be number three in France.

Gianluca PAGLIUCA

18.12.66. Internazionale. 33 caps.

Boycotted by Arrigo Sacchi, for reasons that seemed to have little to do with his undoubted skills, but rehabilitated by Cesare Maldini. Arguably the best Serie A goalkeeper of the last two seasons, he will, if necessary, prove an excellent substitute for Peruzzi.

Angelo PERUZZI

16.2.70. Juventus. 20 caps.

First-choice keeper and a regular since making his debut in 1995. Fast off his line, while agile on it, Peruzzi is generally a cool customer. Seven seasons of regular European and Italian success at Juventus have further consolidated his reputation.

DEFENDERS

Antonio BENARRIVO

21.8.68. Parma. 23 caps.

Something of a hardy annual, Benarrivo is not everyone's idea of an international right back but his pace, experience and competitive qualities make him a certainty.

Fabio CANNAVARO

13.9.73. Parma. 12 caps.

Substitute in Maldini's first game, a 2-0 friendly win against Northern Ireland before making a stunning debut proper in Italy's 1-0 qualifying win against England at Wembley. Never out of the team since.

Alessandro COSTACURTA

24.4.66. Milan. 51 caps (2 gls).

One of the Italian 'senators' and a regular first choice for Italy since making his debut in 1991. Can play as central defender, sweeper or man-to-man marker.

Ciro FERRARA

11.2.67. Juventus. 43 caps.

Another 'senator' who has been a regular since making his debut in a prestige friendly against Argentina (Zurich, 1987). Arguably the most adaptable defender in the squad and one of the few key players whose experience is irreplaceable. Man-to-man marker, left back, right back, central defence, midfield, sweeper – all positions come alike to this players' player.

Paolo MALDINI

26.6.68. Milan. 85 caps (5 gls).

The standard bearer and one of the few world-class Italians of the last decade. A left-back who is not only the most capped player in the squad and a natural leader, but also probably the single most important player, both for his resolute defence and for his ability to attack down the left. He also happens to be the Governor's son.

Alessandro NESTA

19.3.76. Lazio. 9 caps.

One of a number of players who played under Cesare Maldini in his successful Italian Under-21 side. Widely considered one of the best central defenders in Serie A, he can also double up as either a full-back or man-to-man marker.

Christian PANUCCI

12.4.73. Real Madrid. 6 caps.

Panucci's experience with Real Madrid plus his ability to serve as an alternative right-back make him a genuine contender to make the squad, if not the starting 11.

Gianluca PESSOTTO

11.8.70. Juventus. 3 caps.

Alternative left-back on the edge of the squad. May make France 98 thanks to experience of last three seasons with Juve.

Luigi SARTOR

30.1.75. Internazionale. Uncapped.

Inter's good season may work in his favour. Twice summoned for squad sessions by Maldini in 1997, his reputation in Italy is high – witness the £3million Inter paid Vicenza for him last summer.

Moreno TORRICELLI

23.1.70. Juventus. 5 caps.

Ruled out in 1997 with a serious knee injury. His attacking qualities at right-back could earn him a trip to France.

Stefano TORRISI

7.5.71. Bologna. 1 cap.

Along with Salvatore Fresi of Inter, Torrisi could be in the running as an alternative for the sweeper role.

MIDFIELDERS

Demetrio ALBERTINI

23.8.71. Milan. 49 caps (3 gls).

The metronome in the Italian midfield, the man who dictates tempo, Albertini is a quintessential must. First capped in 1991 and ever-present figure in all-winning Milan side of early 1990s.

Dino BAGGIO

24.7.71. Parma. 44 caps (7 gls).

Another automatic first choice of the Maldini regime and the closest that Italy can get to a ready-made replacement for Marco Tardelli of the 1982 World Cup winning side.

Sandro COIS

9.6.72. Fiorentina. Uncapped.

Another Maldini dark horse who is, in fact, well known to the coach thanks to 12 Under-21 caps with him. Ball winner, fetcher and carrier.

Antonio CONTE

31.7.69. Juventus. 8 caps.

Cesare Maldini has made no secret of his high opinion of Conte, who seems sure to travel to France 98 in the role of substitute. Currently Juventus captain, his vast experience with the Turin club can only help his chances.

Luigi DI BIAGIO

3.6.71. Roma. Uncapped.

Good form with Roma could see Di Biagio earn a trip to France, largely as central midfield cover.

Eusebio DI FRANCESCO

8.9.69. Roma. Uncapped.

Aggressive, attacking midfielder who may be tried out in the pre-finals friendlies.

Angelo DI LIVIO

26.7.66. Juventus. 19 caps.

The 'Little Soldier' at Juventus, Di Livio looks sure to be called on for battle in France. 'Up and at em' category of right-sided midfielder or full-back.

Roberto DI MATTEO

29.5.70. Chelsea. 29 caps (1 gl).

Along with Dino Baggio and Albertini, he forms a trio of seeming untouchables in midfield. Tough, competitive and capable of getting forward to score goals, he looks a better player since moving to Chelsea two seasons ago.

Diego FUSER

11.11.68. Lazio. 14 caps.

Surprisingly recalled to the side by Maldini in 1997. An honest journeyman, perhaps a little short of class at the very highest level.

FRANCESCO MORIERO

31.3.69. Internazionale. Uncapped.

Old-fashioned winger and one of the revalations of Inter's season. His pace and willingness to run at defenders may win him a place in the squad.

Damiano TOMMASI

17.5.74. Roma. Uncapped.

An outsider but one who was twice called up in 1997 by Maldini.

FORWARDS

Pierluigi CASIRAGHI

4.4.69. Lazio. 43 caps (13 gls).

Another Maldini favourite, Casiraghi is often considered the first choice for the 'Large' role in the 'Little and Large' Maldini style two-man attack. Neither an excellent season with Lazio nor the fact that he scored the goal which qualified Italy for France 98 (in the 1-0 play-off, second leg win against Russia last November) will do his prospects any harm.

Enrico CHIESA

29.12.70. Parma. 6 caps (3 gls).

Terrific pace, the ability to shoot with either foot and a good season with Parma all suggest that Maldini will think long and hard before leaving Chiesa out of the squad.

Alessandro DEL PIERO

9.11.74. Juventus. 16 caps (7 gls).

Italy expects. Perhaps no individual Italian goes into France 98 under the weight of so much expectation. The undoubted Boy Wonder of contemporary Italian soccer. Has all the technical numbers as well as experience to become one of the stars of France 98, a role he manifestly failed to fulfill at Euro 96 in England.

Filippo INZAGHI

9.8.73. Juventus. 3 caps.

One of the Maldini enigmas – Inzaghi was drafted into the squad for the 0-0 qualifier draw with England in Rome last October but was justifiably substituted at half-time following a miserable performance. Will Maldini give him a second chance?

Fabrizio RAVANELLI

11.12.68. Marseille (Fra). 19 caps (8 gls).

Within days of finding new employment last autumn with Marseille, Ravanelli received a fax from Cesare Maldini telling him to polish his boots and be ready for future World Cup action. That in itself underlines the coach's high opinion of this ex-Perugia, ex-Avellino, ex-Reggiana, ex-Juventus, ex-Middlesbrough striker. Sure to be in the squad, likely to get a game.

Christian VIERI

12.7.73. At. Madrid (Spa). 7 caps (2 gl).

Certain to make the squad, and the Casiraghi's biggest rival for the target man role. If he maintains his best form, he may start France 98 ahead of Casiraghi. Made a dream senior debut under Maldini, scoring Italy's 1000th international goal, against Moldova in March 1997.

Gianfranco ZOLA

5.7.66. Chelsea (Eng). 35 caps (9 gls).

No longer an automatic first choice but certain to make the squad for France 98. Remains one of the most talented strikers around and seems certain to play some role as the skilful little blighter alongside the tall target man.

Captain, son and world-class defender...Paolo Maldini

Marseille Stade Velodrome

THE REBUILT Stade Velodrome will host four group games, plus a second round match, a quarter-final and a semi-final.

The 60-year-old stadium, home to first division side Olympique Marseille, was drastically rebuilt last year and now holds 60,000. About F250million has been spent on new stands and terraces, floodlights, public address and video surveillance systems.

Marseille played host to the World Cup draw last December and Stade Velodrome was the venue for the All-Star match which preceded the draw.

The stadium is best reached on metro line 1 (to Castellane then no. 21 bus) or line 2 to Rond Point du Prado station.

F250million reconstruction...Marseille's Stade Velodrome

Montpellier Stade de la Mosson

MONTPELLIER'S Stade de la Mosson will host five group games (Morocco-Norway, Paraguay-Bulgaria, Italy-Cameroon, Colombia-Tunisia and Germany-Iran) and the second-round match featuring the winner of Group F (Germany, USA, Yugoslavia, Iran).

The stadium (capacity 35,500) has undergone a F110million refit in time for the finals. The changes included the construction of a new main stand, installation of seats, new changing room, video surveillance and public address systems and floodlights.

The stadium is best reached by bus lines 1 and 2 (get off at Mosson).

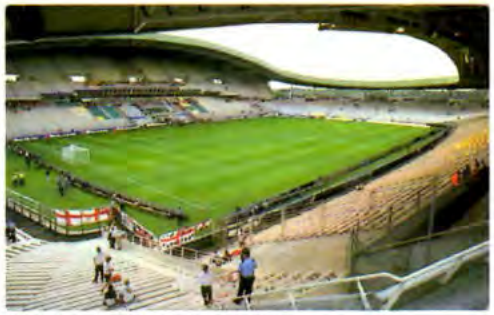
Major refit...Stade de la Mosson, Montpellier

Nantes Stade de la Beaujoire

THE Stade de la Beaujoire will host five group games (Spain-Nigeria, Brazil-Morocco, Japan-Croatia, Chile-Cameroon, USA-Yugoslavia) and one quarter-final.

The 40,000-capacity stadium has had less work done on it than other France 98 venues as it is already an impressive structure, with its arched roof and curved terrace. The bulk of the F45million was spent on 'wind-protection' measures around the stadium. Other changes included new changing rooms and public address and video surveillance systems.

The stadium is best reached by taking metro line A (to Arenes) or buses 1 and 12 (get off at Pont St Michel) or 92 (get off at Daste).



Windy stadium...Stade de la Beaujoire, Nantes

France 98

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